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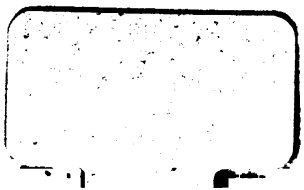

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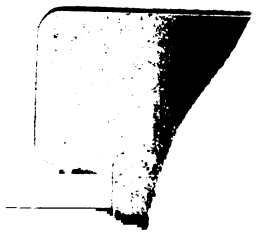

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MY LADY:

A Tale of Modern Life.

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A better wife, let him in nought be trusted,
For speaking false in that."—KING HENRY VIII.

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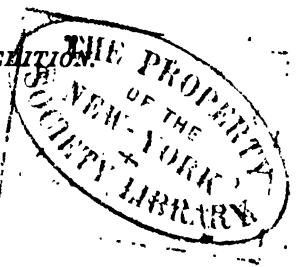

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MY LADY:

A TALE OF MODERN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"Dame Eleanor! that is mamma's name. Oh! what do they say about her? I wonder if she was like mamma."

"No, indeed, Edie. She was a young lady. I know all about her: she died of a broken heart." So said Evelyn Umphraville, with a sigh of girlish sentiment. She was seventeen—the eldest daughter. She loved melancholy stories, pensive songs, the pretty-foolish play of youth with sorrows of which it knows nothing. They were all clustering their young heads over a manuscript book on the table, a history of the family, compiled by an amateur literary gentleman of the last generation, a younger brother: five young Umphravilles, happy and high-spirited, by no means disposed to "profit" by the mistakes and mischances of their ancestors, but extremely well pleased to be amused by the same.

"A broken heart! that's rubbish; there's no such thing," cried the middle one of the three young giants, whom Evelyn patronisingly called "the boys."

"For shame, Rothes! how can you say so? but it is only like you boys; women know better. Yes, indeed; I do not mind: you *may* ask mamma." Mamma sat at another table, some little distance off, with a book before her, but seemed to find wonderfully little attraction in her book. She was not at all of an abstract mind in general; but either the book was not an interesting one, or Lady Umphraville was occupied with some abstruse question of domestic economy to-day.

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"A broken heart? yes, there is such a thing," said the family umpire with considerable gravity; "it is Evelyn who is right this time. I have even known it once or twice among our own friends."

"Mamma, tell us about them," cried little Edie.

Rothes raised his eyebrows, yet inclined his ear. As for Evelyn, she seemed a little dubious of her mother's explanation; while Harry, the biggest and youngest of the boys, made a somewhat loud interruption—"Is it all about falling in love—and then your sweetheart falling in love with somebody else, and then getting sick and dying and forgiving everybody, and making a whole lot of people as miserable as they can be? That's Evelyn's way: do you mean that, mamma?"

Evelyn's long ringlets drooped, though she flashed an indignant glance out of her blue eyes at her brother. Poor Evelyn thought it was her fate not to be understood. "Do you remember poor Mrs. Hastings at the cliff when her boy was lost at sea? and Mary Goring when all her little brothers and sisters died? *They* did not die either of them," said Lady Umphraville, "but they broke their hearts. Sometimes people break their hearts in Evelyn's way, too; but I don't excuse them so readily. You are quite right, Harry, after all: it is a poor thing to make a lot of people, who do love us, miserable, all for the sake of one who does not."

"Yes, mamma," said Edie, who, being only ten years old, and a very little girl "of her age," had privileges; "yes, mamma," said this wise young critic gravely; "but it makes a prettier story than the other—for Mrs. Hastings and Mary Goring were so old."

"So old that they ought to have died any way?" said Lady Umphraville: "well, perhaps that is just, too; but, Rothes, don't be too sceptical,—there are broken hearts."

"That point being settled, let us return to Dame Eleanor," said Hugh, the eldest, who had possession of the manuscript volume. "Dame Eleanor had a bad husband, who ran away from her—the best thing he could do, one would suppose, for he was a scoundrel, though he was our ancestor; and that was the reason of her heartbreak: do you approve of that, mother? She died."

"I do not approve of any one dying who has children—unless she cannot help it," said Lady Umphraville, who changed colour a little at this description of her namesake, though she spoke with a momentary smile. "Now, Hugh, that will do;

Edie has her lessons, and I have some errands in the village for Evelyn: Rothes, will you go with your sister? there are a good many things to do."

"Oh! I know!—before papa comes home," cried Edie, pulling towards her, with no particular good will, a book of French exercises.

Her mother made no reply, but rose and went to a little cabinet in a corner to look for something. Lady Umphraville was middle-aged, large, handsome, with a great deal of dignity, gracious, ample, and mother-like in her whole bearing; dignity, which made everybody respectful, yet chilled none. She had never been beautiful, even in her youth; her face was by no means "correct" or regular, but it was of that kind of imperfection which pleases both eye and heart. There was no small amount of decision—the promptitude and authority of one long used to rule—in the upper lip, which was just a little longer than it should have been, and in one confirmed longitudinal wrinkle between the eyebrows; and the quiet brown eyes could flash and could laugh, though the repose and calm of their ordinary brightness was so pleasant to look upon. She dressed always very richly and softly, with a preference for satins and velvets, but scarcely ever wore any jewels: she was not the kind of woman to need sparkles of precious stones about her; and her round youthful arms bore no manacles of gold, but came softly out of delicate lace and cambric: there was not a bracelet or a clasp, or any kind of pricking thing about her whole apparel,—she was always safe to take into her tender arms the tenderest of babies;—and, somehow, this peculiarity of dress added to the entire femininess of her appearance. You associated children with her by a natural instinct: she was mother-like in every look, movement, and tone. To-day, and at this present moment, a shadow of uneasiness was upon my lady's face. There seemed little occasion for it in that handsome group of children, all more or less like herself, all well-dispositioned, hopeful, and affectionate; yet it was impossible to miss seeing the cloud upon her brow. The immediate effect of it was to create an unusual activity and quietness among the young people: they dispersed to their occupations almost in silence. It was not a frequent occurrence; but Lady Umphraville was not like to be moved by trifles: they gave an involuntary influence and reverence to the disturbed look upon my lady's face.

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CHAPTER II.

The day was breezy and clear, the wind somewhat chill, blowing from the sea. Through the bright daylight atmosphere, the hazy line of the Sussex Downs, folding here and there a mansion or a cottage into a sheltered nook of their soft slopes, stretched far away on either hand; while at the foot of this descending pathway, the level country, dotted with church-towers and villages, ran down, a many-coloured, much-divided strip of land to the slanting sands, the stony beach, and the broad sea. The sea was something chafed, showing curls of white upon its darkened surface, and tossing contemptuously the white-sailed pleasure-boats which ventured half a mile from the shore; and the sun shone upon the Brighton cliffs far off to the left, standing up sharp and distinct in their grey whiteness against the chill blue skies of spring. Low at the foot of this winding road lay the village green, the fringe of village houses, the old Norman tower of Broadmead, whither, at this present moment, Evelyn and Rothes Umphraville—one carrying a parcel of books and the other a basket—were directing their devious way. Devious, because Evelyn was a botanist, a fern gatherer, a collector of pretty leaves and rare wild flowers, all in a pretty amateur young lady-like way; and Rothes, to say no worse of him, was a boy, and given to all manner of digressions. The two, however, were very good company, after their fraternal fashion, now and then falling suddenly upon a point of interest in common, but for the most part entirely careless of each other's occupations, making halts and making advances, each at his and her own will, each quickening the pace of the other by a "Come on, Evelyn!" or, "Make haste, Rothes!" yet both perfectly content to lag far behind or make way before, as occasion was. As they descended, however, leaving behind them the populous banks of furze—touched into animation by here and there an early golden blossom—and all the nestled hollows full of pretty weeds and leaflets, the young wayfarers began to keep close to each other and to pursue their way more soberly; and Rothes was in the very midst of a long and somewhat discursive account of a famous cricket match, told *à propos* of Broadmead Green, the scene of the same, when his sister interrupted him with a sudden exclamation—"Oh! Rothes, where shall we go to? my arm is *so* tired with this basket." Cut short thus

abruptly in his animated account of innings and winnings, Rothes remained for a moment speechless with indignation.

"Much good it is talking to you girls," cried the young gentleman with disgust. "Give it here! but I wouldn't carry a lot of rubbishing weeds if *I* was tired. You can go where you please; but I'm going to old Hardwick, first thing."

"It is very wrong of you indeed, Rothes, to call the rector *old* Hardwick," said Evelyn.

"Bother!" answered her brother; "I wish he was *young* Hardwick, with all my heart; then he might be some use to a fellow. Now, mind you, it's hard—I don't grumble, but it is hard—to set a man down to carry Sunday School books and look after a lot of scrubby children, and talk to the old women, all because there's a living in the family: it's a horrid shame!"

"It is a great shame of you to say so, Rothes," said Evelyn, looking a little frightened: "if papa were to hear you!—for he always says he has no anxiety about you, if Harry were only provided for as well."

"Yes, indeed, easy enough for him!" said the discontented Rothes; "let Harry take it if he has a mind: *I* don't want to be provided for; I'd rather work for myself; I'd half as soon be a flunkey as a parson. It's no good looking shocked, for it's quite true."

"Then, Rothes, it is quite wrong," said Evelyn, gravely. "Mamma would be sorry, if she heard you; and papa *so* angry: you would not venture to say that to papa."

"I would venture to say anything to any one!" cried the boy, with heat and indignation; then, however, the heroic Rothes calmed down a little. "I should just like to know," said the young gentleman, after a pause, "what papa means by staying so long away."

"I wonder, too; isn't it strange?" said Evelyn: "I am sure mamma does not like it, and I can't make it out. Minnie Morris says we ought to have a house in town for the season, now that Hugh and I are old enough; but it seems very odd what papa can do in London alone. Oh! Rothes, look! there's the rector on his pony, on the road to Heathcote; something has happened to papa!" The startled Rothes turned from gazing across the three-cornered bit of ground, which divided the bye-path from the road, to cast a hurried glance at his sister. The next moment, the impetuous boy vaulted over the low stone wall, and rushed across the little

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field, shouting loudly to a passenger upon the highway. This passenger was a middle-aged man, in a clerical dress, and mounted upon a self-willed pony, which had no disposition whatever to ascend the hilly path. As his steed pranced about the road and backed into the hedge, taking advantage of this unexpected summons, the excellent rector of Broadmead made no very dignified appearance; and, whether it was the wind at present threatening his hat, or the unmanageable pony, or the sudden call of Rothes Umphraville, it is certain that the rector turned a very troubled face towards his young assailant, and looked very much as if, pony permitting, he would gladly have run away.

"Hey! look here! Mr. Hardwick!" shouted Rothes, bounding across the uneven grass of the little field. "Where are you going? what's the matter? what's happened to papa?" The rector made a desperate effort to get to the side of the road nearest to his interrogator, but paused, per force, in the middle, and called in a loud faltering whisper,

"Rothes! hush! don't be so imprudent! hush! I tell you; there's your sister: hold your tongue, will you, boy?" The unusual impatience of this address brought Rothes, bursting through a gap in the hedge, to Mr. Hardwick's side.

"Are you going to Heathcote? is anything wrong? There must be something wrong, or you would not look so: what's happened to papa?"

"Rothes, my dear boy, go to your sister," said the rector, in a conciliatory tone; "there now, there's an excellent lad. I'm going to Heathcote, but only—only to have a little conversation with your mother; that's all: there now, make haste; Evelyn's coming, and I have to be back to dinner: let me go."

"You'll stay to dinner at Heathcote," said Rothes: "something's wrong; is he ill? my lady doesn't know." A groan burst from the good rector's lips. "No, heaven help her! my lady doesn't know. Rothes, boy, it's not for you to hear: let me go." And the rector, though he was no equestrian, shook the pony's bridle from the boy's detaining grasp, and resolutely trotted away. Rothes did not know what to make of it: he walked slowly round the corner of the field, to meet his sister, going by the legitimate road in a very common-place way, full of cogitations. When he was within hearing, Evelyn called to him to know what it was. Rothes was very slow to answer.

"He's gone to Heathcote; he'll be there to dinner: he

wants to talks to my lady,—that's all. I say, Evelyn," concluded the lad, "if I were you, I'd go home."

"Mamma would not be pleased," said the more dutiful girl; "but what is it? has Mr. Hardwick heard from papa?" Rothes shook his head with perplexity. "I don't know: let's make haste; let's get done with it," he cried, setting off at full speed towards the village, where Evelyn, half running, half laughing, half ashamed of her rapid pace, and a little anxious and uneasy into the bargain, followed him. They were both disturbed, though they could not tell why; for the young people knew very well, though no one told them, that Sir Philip had been an unreasonable time away, and that his long absence had brought a cloud upon my lady's face. Thinking upon this in their own private cogitations, the boy disposed to take up his mother's quarrel hotly, if quarrel there was, and the girl concluding with secret and timid disapprobation that it was "very wrong of papa," they said no more about the matter; yet, by tacit consent, turned their steps first to the rectory, very willing to find out if they could, at second hand, what Mr. Hardwick's errand to Heathcote might be.

CHAPTER III.

The rectory was on the other side of the village green, between Broadmead and the sea: it was a large two-storied house, seated low upon a level lawn, which, somehow, with its length and flatness, seemed to diminish the height of the old edifice it surrounded. The building was of ancient brick, greened over by minute mosses; a great jessamine tree, pruned with the utmost nicety, stretched its long, slender, leafless branches, in anatomical precision, over the front of the house; and, in the middle of the lawn, stood a large cedar, still further increasing, with its wide horizontal circles, the low, level aspect of the enclosure. The whole was shut in by a high wall, and entered by a narrow green door, with a square grating in the midst, by means of which loophole, outsiders might gain a glimpse of the rectory; and the rectory itself, a one-sided look of the church and the world without. The wall was covered with ivy, which hung over in great bushes on the outer side; and the well-kept flower-borders were already gay with as many flowers as the skill of the rector, the rector's sisters, niece, and gardener could win from the early spring. The drawing-room,

which stretched along the whole front of the house, was as low, as level, and, in summer-time, almost as green as the garden it looked upon: three narrow, small-framed windows broke the wall on one side; on the other was a broad low mirror, very dark and old, in which all the windows and their hangings reappeared, slightly distorted. Another mirror of the same complexion was over the mantelpiece: the furniture of the room was all old-fashioned, a little faded, greenish in colour, well preserved, and comfortable. There was a considerable number of embroidered screens and footstools, two work-tables, with bags of green silk, and three easy chairs; the fire-place, the sole exception to the general antiquity of the room, was of the newest invention, very low, gleaming with circles of polished steel, and throwing the full glow of a capital fire over the floor and the comfortable slippered feet of its inmates: the present inmates—the rector's particular chair being vacant—were three ladies, the Miss Hardwicks and their niece. Miss Hardwick the elder sat at one corner, with a little round screen of green silk, which was fixed to the mantelpiece, defending her from the fervid glow of the fire. She was a very large woman, of the genus jolly, with a mass of strong grey hair rolled into a knot behind and forming bows at her face; face, features, hands, everything about her, were of the largest: her dress was dark, not very fine in material, and by no means distinguished for neatness; and in her hands she held an immense piece of knitting, fleecy-white Berlin wool, and long pins of ivory. Prettiness of any description had never belonged to her; but a certain amount of droll good-humour and an unquestionable kindness made the rector's eldest sister one of the most popular persons in the parish. She was very liberal in her fashion, and had "an independent income," a fact which you could plainly discern from the freedom and breadth of everything around her, and even, by shrewd implication, from the homely fashion of her dress. Miss Clarissa, on the other side of the fire, was a very different person; she *had* been pretty in her youth, and even now, at forty-five, had not quite got over it: *her* dress, if it was sober in colour, was rich in kind and made with great nicety, in the best fashion; her collars and sleeves and dainty laced-handkerchiefs were beautiful to behold; she wore a frilled black silk apron, black lace mits upon her pretty white hands, and a number of rings upon her lady-like fingers; her hair, which was not grey, but brown with a faint sprinkling of white, was dressed in the same old fashion.

as her sister's, though with extreme neatness; and, with her chair drawn back to be out of range of the fire, she rested the prettiest slippers in the world upon one of the embroidered footstools. Miss Clarissa had some delicate needlework in her hands, which she carried on in an easy, leisurely fashion. She was a "perfect gentlewoman," and, if truth must be told, was very much aware of the fact, and kept up her character accordingly. The third person in the room was of an entirely distinct race; she was about twenty, bright-eyed, full of observation, quick in all her movements,—the most self-commanded, prompt, and ready, of all the inhabitants of the rectory; her dress was of that kind which, being perfectly proper and unremarkable, belonged to herself, and attracted notice from no one; she could be sentimental when she chose, but had a gleam of wit, mischief, and derision in her eye. Those comfortable Miss Hardwicks, with their "independent incomes," had nothing whatever in common with Minnie. She was a child of a large struggling family, who had long ago swallowed up the fortune of their mother, and whose father was a needy professional man, through whose fingers every chance of success slipped. Minnie was here to accomplish her own fortune, should that be practicable, and to do what she could for her little brothers and sisters at home. The rectory acknowledged her activity, her readiness, her entertaining qualities, with a little secret dread of the concealed powers and purpose, which already gave her an unacknowledged, but half respected and resisted, influence in the affairs of the house. She was so handy, so useful, so full of resources, that even her aunts, though they agreed in thinking her "too clever for a girl," were glad, on most occasions, to make use of her abilities; while to the unready and hesitating rector, she was the most valuable person in the world.

Such was the little company upon which Evelyn and Rothes entered out of breath: the parcel of books came in with Rothes, being destined for the village library; but Evelyn's basket remained outside. The brother and sister, perfectly young, ingenuous, and inexperienced, with neither part to play nor character to keep up, fresh from the spring winds, and disturbed by a little natural anxiety and expectation, made as great a contrast as it is possible to conceive to the old ladies and the young lady of the rectory. Their arrival, though neither of them perceived it, produced some little uneasiness and excitement in this comfortable circle. Miss Clarissa

dropped her needlework with a little start, Miss Hardwick eyed them with odd gravity, as she might have inspected a "subject" under some delicate operation, and Minnie, flying to Evelyn, bestowed upon her in overflowing measure the caresses of a young lady's welcome, which latter proceeding Rothes regarded—as his own favourite Rover might have regarded it—with the instinctive suspicion, common to all natural young animals, of demonstrations unreal and overstrained.

"Books for the library: Lady Umphraville is so kind! My love to your mamma, dear," said Miss Clarissa, "and we are *quite* obliged: it is quite like her goodness, thinking of us when she has so much to think of herself."

"I don't know that mamma has more to think of than usual," said Evelyn with a little spirit. "We met the rector going to Heathcote; is there any news?"

"Why don't you all go to town, Evelyn?" said Miss Hardwick, interposing; "gentlemen shouldn't be left to themselves too much: Sir Philip, I daresay, finds it quite dull in London. Why don't you go and see everything? you don't intend to wait till you're my age, do you? I had half a mind to go to Heathcote myself yesterday, to talk to my lady: she ought to let you see the world."

"Yes, Evelyn darling, it *is* delightful in the season, when one has a great many parties to go to," said Minnie, "which you would be sure to have, you know. As for me, I always have to mope at home, and teach the little ones, so I like the country best; but I am always honest and tell everybody why."

"Going to parties is a very evanescent pleasure," said Miss Clarissa, with the air of one who had fully investigated the subject; "but young people gain many better advantages from occasional residence in town: however, as the chances are quite against Evelyn going to town *this* season, we had better drop the subject. Tell Lady Umphraville, my dear, that I should have sent her the accounts of the Clothing Society, but that I knew she would be otherwise occupied to-night; and, as soon as she feels able for the exertion, I shall send them with pleasure; but you must let me know ——"

"I say," cried Rothes abruptly, striking into the conversation, "*I* should just like to know what you all mean."

"Do you know of anything that has happened?" echoed Evelyn: "is papa ill?"

"Ill! not a bit," cried Miss Hardwick; "as well as I am,

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who never have an ache. Oh, dear no! don't be afraid; there's nothing the matter with Sir Philip." Evelyn grew pale and began to falter. She wondered again, in spite of herself, if papa could have done anything very wrong. Rothes took it up more angrily; he said,

"Come on, Evelyn, we'll go home and see what's wrong; never mind all the talk: I daresay it's nothing, after all." So saying, the boy plucked at his sister's shawl and swung out of the room. Evelyn did not get away so easily; she was kissed all round, and admonished.

"There, don't give way; I only believe the half of what *I* hear," said big Miss Hardwick.

"Compose yourself, my love; I am sure you will try to be a great comfort to your poor mother," said Miss Clarissa; "and ——"

"Oh! Evelyn, darling, I do *so* feel for you!" burst from the sympathetic bosom of Minnie. Evelyn made her way out perfectly bewildered; and, feeling as if some great mysterious convulsion of nature was at hand, she seized upon Rothes' arm to consult with him anxiously, as soon as they were free of the rectory walls. What could it be? Rothes could not throw the slightest light upon the subject; he only exclaimed with impatience,—"Bother those old witches! let's go home."

CHAPTER IV.

The walk home was not near so pleasant as the former one: the young people could not resist speaking about the mysterious trouble which seemed to hang over them, but could not form the faintest idea what it was. Then Evelyn's basket, which contained sundry little comforts for sundry old women in the village, lay heavy on Evelyn's conscience as she turned from the rectory gate. Was it right to keep back poor old Widow Hutchins' tea because we were in trouble? Was it right to disappoint Mary Sims of her large-printed Testament? The conscientious girl could not venture to be so selfish: she turned back, in spite of the remonstrances, delivered rather hotly, of Rothes, to satisfy her pensioners. Last of all, there was some jelly to be carried to poor little Ellen Milburn, who was said to be dying "in a decline." *That* was at the further end of the village; and thither the dutiful Evelyn went alone, deserted by her impatient young squire. She was very anxious

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herself, but was of a womanly submissive nature, and carried her tender young conscience into all her little duties. Though she had rather an extreme amount of sentiment in her guileless imagination, and loved most of all those pensive heroines who weep their lives away and refuse to be comforted, Evelyn could not be selfishly sorrowful in her own person: she thought it better to have a half hour longer of suspense and anxiety than to keep back the jelly or the tea. But the good girl was not rewarded according to her deserts in this instance; while she was bending over her poor young patient's bed, making the particular inquiries which sick people love to hear, it happened to Evelyn to overhear scraps of conversation not intended for her. The first speaker was the mistress of the village school; the other—also a professional person—the sexton's wife. They had met each other in the street, just opposite the invalid's window, which had been opened to let in the fresh air of the spring. "The town's talk's of Sir Philip," said Mrs. Mattocks; "he's in every one's mouth. Lord bless us! it's little wonder when poor folks goes wrong after a gentleman like him."

"You don't say so! what has he done?" cried the other.

"*I* had it from Sam'l at the rectory," said Mrs. Mattocks; "it's a terrible story: I can't just undertake to say what he's done; but he's been a-illusing of my lady and taking up with light women,—them furriners! When I heard of them at Heathcote, two year come next midsummer, I knowed how it would be."

"You don't say so!" once more exclaimed the schoolmistress. "Bless us all! what will my lady do?"

Evelyn could not wait for any more; choking with horror, fright, and anxiety, she cut short—though, even then, not without a compunction—the poor young invalid's description of her ailments, and hurried away. She made no more pauses on the road; but, whenever she was clear of the village, where—more than ever now—it was necessary to preserve due dignity, she quickened her pace, and running at full speed, overtook Rothes, before he had reached the wooded and verdant platform upon which stood the house of Heathcote. Rothes looked at her in amazement as she came up to him; but Evelyn did not wait to make any explanation: she ran past him breathless, her cheeks flushed and her heart beating. Rothes followed hastily—and in the front of the house they encountered Hugh, dressed for a journey, and

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striking down some withered stalks of flowers with his riding whip with the nervous impatience of great excitement. Rothes called out to him, "What's the matter?" loudly, as soon as they were within hearing; but Evelyn said "Hush! hush!" and ran almost into her elder brother's arms.

Reaching him, the poor girl began to cry, ashamed even to ask for further certainty. Rothes, who had no clue to their distress, demanded again what was the cause. "My father—Sir Philip, I mean," said Hugh, blushing all over his ingenuous young face, "has gone away—has left my mother; we have nothing more to do with him. Don't cry, Evie!" exclaimed the youth, growing hoarse with indignation, shame, and natural distress; "he shall never come near *you;* he shall never dare to look my mother in the face again!" And Hugh, though he was a man, burst forth into one great, loud sob, and turned away hastily, ashamed of his natural emotion, ashamed, above all, with the fiery, fierce, indignant shame of youth, of the cause of this family calamity; while Rothes, growing darkly red, followed him with glowing eyes, half amazed, half comprehending. Evelyn, poor tender heart, only cried,—cried and hid her face in her hands, ashamed to her very heart. They were good children, pure-minded, innocent, and ignorant: the touch of pollution horrified and dismayed them; they dared not look into each other's faces, knowing that such a tale had been told, or was true.

"And mamma," said Evelyn at last; "oh! Hugh, mamma, poor mamma!" The exclamation startled Rothes, who had been awed into silence.

"Well," cried the boy, with a sudden long breath, "well!—some people's mothers have gone away; it's not so bad as that." Hugh lifted his arm passionately. "How dare you!" cried the elder brother in momentary fury, "how dare you name my mother's name in the same breath? I know you don't mean it, Rothes: well, neither do I; I don't know what I say."

"And all the servants must know, too," cried Evelyn. "Oh! boys, don't quarrel now; think upon poor mamma: and what shall we all do?"

"I am going off now, this moment, to make sure; I might perhaps find him, or—or something," said Hugh; "but I did not like to go before seeing my mother: I will start at once, now you have come, Evie; and, Rothes, you are the eldest son when I am gone: take care of my mother and the girls; mind

you let no one come near to vex them: it's *my* duty, if I had not another first. I must seek him out and try to prevent the disgrace: we can't live together again; we can never be an honourable family more—but everybody need not know: perhaps I may be in time to keep our disgrace from the world."

"Hugh," said Rothes, "you are not his guardian; you are only his son: you've no right to go after him,—stay at home."

"Hugh, he is papa; he is our father after all," said Evelyn timidly; "don't go unless mamma says so; don't leave mamma now." Hugh paused, staggered for a moment in his unreasoning passionate impulse. It was not easy to say, even to himself, what good he could do; but he could not stand still and wait for the course of events. He began to strike down the flower-stalks again and beat the bushes with his whip, now and then casting wistful glances at his mother's window: he felt indignantly that he was a man and ought to do something—yet, notwithstanding, he was a boy, and knew not what to do. Then Evelyn clasped his arms with both her hands and entreated him, "Hugh, don't go away; papa—for he is papa, though he is wicked—would only be angry and make you angry if you found him; and there will be a great deal to bear at home: stay and stand by mamma; it is all we can do now."

Hugh burst out into a passionate invective, "I will not call him father; he has forfeited all his claims upon me!" cried the excited youth. "You are right, Evelyn: remember, both of you, we have to stand by my mother now." They went in at last to the house, where wonder and excitement reigned, but where no one knew what had happened. The young people themselves knew no details; they only knew that Sir Philip had gone away with a lady, that the rector had received intelligence of it from her friends, and had come, the fact being certain, to tell the forsaken wife. And my lady was in her own room, and was not to be disturbed;—that was all that any one heard to-day.

CHAPTER V.

My lady was in her chamber alone; she had been there ever since her interview with the rector, three or four hours ago; and there she remained, abstracting herself from the house-

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hold, as she had scarcely ever done before, though she had known a full share of ordinary troubles. She was sitting quite idly by the fire, which began to fail and die out, looking fixedly at the white falling ashes, yet perceiving nothing of them. My lady's cheeks were flushed and her eyes looked too bright, wakeful, and feverish; she held her hands clasped together in her lap, and, for nearly an hour, had never stirred. It was drawing towards evening, and the great pieces of furniture—for the room was larger than dressing-rooms usually are, and was furnished accordingly—looked bigger and blacker and duskier as the daylight stole away and the fire died on the hearth. It was strange to see the solitary figure, sitting so motionless in the twilight; stranger still, to think that this was my lady, who was never without occupation, and, in common times, never knew what languor was. The story she had heard was enough to startle any wife: her husband—a man no longer young, her wedded partner and companion for twenty years—her husband had gone away, eloped, left her guiltily with a guilty woman, another man's wife. She had been very slow to realize the possibility of anything so monstrous; she would not believe it until proofs indisputable were placed before her. It was a frightful change to be wrought in one day, in a single hour: the earth seemed to have opened close to her feet, leaving her who had been on peaceful common ground yesterday on the dizzy edge of a tremendous precipice: no sudden earthquake was ever so appalling. The first shock was over now: what *it* had been, no one could tell, for passions and frenzies were not in my lady's nature. She sat now by her solitary fireside, unobservant of everything, but not paralysed; the flush on her cheek, the feverish lustre of that eye, which saw no material thing around, yet was so vivid and occupied, were enough to tell how busy, how intensely engaged, how far from idleness were my lady's thoughts. Yes, no widowhood could have made such an entire and instantaneous disruption, such an abrupt termination of all her previous life; her mind, her heart, her imagination were in a tumult, not of jealousy, or vengefulness, or despair, but of eager, anxious, painful questioning—what to do? For Lady Umphraville was not a passionate woman idolatrously devoted to the man who was her lover and her husband; she was an affectionate wife, knowing no interests but his, no love of which he had not a part; no emergency could have fallen upon Sir Philip, in which he could not have relied upon my lady to the furthest limit of all her

cares and powers. Sickness, misfortune, necessity of any kind, would have made her cheerful solicitude, devotion: he was her husband, the central point of all her many concerns—but nothing human could have narrowed her healthful mind and nature into one burning passion: she was a woman, an individual being, a mother charged with the weightiest duties, a member of society; she was not only and solely a wife. Therefore she had no mind to be a Queen Eleanor: it was not cruel pangs of jealousy which overwhelmed her; she was not jealous so much as disgusted—a far less recoverable condition—disgusted, sickened, horrified, feeling almost a humiliation in her own person, and struck with the amazed and uncomprehending wonder, common enough to women, how he, the nearest to her own heart so long, *could* have had so little appreciation, so little knowledge of her, as to prefer a woman who *could* be polluted to her own most spotless self. This amazement, painful and humiliating, went to the heart of the deserted wife; a sore, mortified, humbled surprise,—how was it possible? and, conjoined to that, a hasty indignant plunge into new plans and arrangements—a troubled and rapid consideration—what to do. The children—ah! the children,—young lives so innocent, so honourable, unaware of evil,—had the polluted father, and not the pure mother, the first right to their guardianship? But my lady had no terror of the law; she had experience enough to know that human affairs, which are seldom guided by pure and abstract justice, are seldomer still directed by the formal letters of legality. She felt an entire conclusion put to one part of her life; whatever passion there might be in her heart she subdued, and endured as she might. She was a mother and an honourable woman, and she had to think for and establish the safety of her children and the order of her future life.

Thus, while Hugh, Rothes, and Evelyn, consulted together with distress, fright, and indignation, below; while Harry, and Edie, and all the servants, marvelled and asked questions; while the whole history, with all its chances, was discussed in the rectory and circulated through the village; and while Sir Philip and his companion hurried over continental roads in their guilty and feverish journey, my lady sat alone in her chamber, a forsaken woman, suffering the darkness to fall over her solitude,—a veil to the tumult of her thoughts. When it was quite dark, a sudden vivid consciousness of her position struck her like an arrow: she was widowed, bereaved; the

Philip of her pure imagination, the father of her children, where was he gone? Oh! it was horrible, horrible! She closed her hands over her eyes with a desperate pressure, as if that could shut it out; but the night had fallen dark, cloudy, and starless, — it hid my lady's agony from every human eye, even from her own.

CHAPTER VI.

You could not have entered the Heathcote drawing-room that night without a consciousness of something painful and mysterious in the house. The three elders, so anxious to whisper together, so afraid to betray that they were whispering; the two children, so watchful, so keen-sighted, putting things together and drawing their own conclusions; the servants making so many errands here, and finding so many occasions to consult Miss Evelyn and Mr. Hugh; the woeful blank and vacancy made by the absence of my lady, without whom the room seemed somehow disfurnished and uninhabited; even the disarrangement of ordinary hours and customs, — the dinner, which Evelyn had taken upon herself to countermand —unless mamma wished it,—and for which the agitated and unaccustomed girl hesitated to order tea as a substitute. Lady Umphraville had sent word that she had a headache, and would not come down to dinner. They were all too young to dissemble their anxiety; but with their anxiety mingled a newborn awe and reverence for their mother, as the chief sufferer in this strange and great calamity. As for Hugh, a fierce youthful impulse of defiance and revenge—the flush of natural chivalry with which the generous young knightly spirit starts to the rescue of an injured woman—mingled painfully with the old natural love and respect for his father and all the family bonds of obedience and affection. Harry and little Edith looked on at all this with the keenest curiosity: it was "as good as a play" to them; and all their keen young faculties were strained to the utmost to find it out. It was nearly eight o'clock when my lady entered the room; she was ushered in officiously by the old white-headed butler, who had been waiting, as it seemed, for no other purpose; and, at her entrance, Hugh and Rothes rose simultaneously. Evelyn ran forward to her mother with a child's instinct of consolation; the lads stood back, confused and eager, waiting for her notice. "Hush!

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my love, hush!" said my lady; "not a word now, Evelyn; I will speak to you all presently: I am not able now." She was not able, indeed; the sight of the family, whom this fatal stroke must disunite and rend asunder, overpowered the mother of all these children: she withdrew abruptly to the sofa, where Edie pretended to learn her lessons. Even the sharp, curious glances of the little girl, who did not know, were more endurable than the distress and affection of poor Evelyn, the burning shame-faced looks of the boys. My lady began to talk to Edie and look over her lesson-books, speaking very slowly, the elder ones noticed, like one who has to command herself, but in reality anchoring her disturbed mind upon these humble realities, which must go on all the same in peace or in trouble. Even Edie's curious little soul was subdued and melted; her little bosom swelled: she did not know what was the matter, but somehow would have been glad to steal into her mother's arms and cry like Evelyn; she was even glad to receive her good-night kiss and go away to bed. Mamma's tender gravity, so absolute and yet so touching, cured Edie of her curiosity. Harry, too, who was inclined to be resentful, consented to take himself away at last in quietness. Then my lady made a pause and an effort. They all drew near to her with a sudden timidity, feeling that she alone must speak. "Children," she said at last, with a tremble in her voice, which gradually steadied, "I suppose you all know what has happened; I am very much grieved that you do: it was very, very injudicious of Mr. Hardwick—but it cannot be remedied now. This may make a great difference to us all—a great difference! nothing in the world can take us back again to yesterday. I have not formed any plans yet; but I thought it best to speak to you at once, that no more may be said on the subject until a real crisis comes. When your father—when Sir Philip returns—I shall have to find another home, Hugh; it may be wrong, perhaps,—perhaps even such an injury should be borne for your sakes—but I cannot do it; my dearest boys, I cannot bear it, even for you."

"Bear it! for *us?*" cried Hugh, passionately; "do you think we could bear it for you, mother, mother! you whose honour and name are our glory? I thought of going after him myself: that would not do; but let me go at once and find another home for us all. It is a horrible misfortune; but I thank God I am old enough to be of some use, and you can bear to be served by your own sons: let no stranger have

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anything to do with it; let us go away!" My lady laid her hand on his arm as he stood by her, and leaned upon him heavily. Poor Hugh! he was only a boy; it made his heart full. He kissed her other hand with trembling lips and cried aloud that no one should dare insult his mother. There was comfort in the pride and hope with which she looked upon her boy.

"Hush! no one will try to insult me," she said; "hush! Hugh, the future must be managed calmly, without passion; calmly! it is a hard word to say, when the thing is the breaking up of our family, the end of all our past life; but we must do it: there are only plans, arrangements, and what the law will permit, to think of now."

"The breaking up of our family!" Hugh and Evelyn echoed the words together—she with dismay, he with an eager remonstrance: "We will all leave Heathcote with our mother!" Rothes alone said nothing, but stood keenly watching his mother's face, reading all that she meant in her eyes.

"I do not know the law," said my lady, slowly, and her lip quivered; "I am not sure that it gives me any right to you at all. Yes, boys, it is true; I am only your mother: I cannot stand, as your father could, upon my rights. I believe, indeed," she added, still more slowly, "I believe I have no rights; you are all *his*." She did not take any notice of what her children answered, nor of the vehement disclaimer of Hugh. She went on herself as if her mind were so strained to that point, that she could only follow out and insist upon her own thought. "This is hard," said my lady, in her low, slow, painful voice, "very hard, in circumstances like mine; and, therefore, there must be no violence, no passion, nothing but arrangement, in what we do. My boys, you will be men soon, you will be able to care for yourselves and all of us; but Evelyn and Edie are girls, and must go with me: I must guide your sisters—I dare not leave them behind; therefore, dear, dear boys, my best support and comfort, you must learn to control and master your own selves, for the sake of the weaker ones among you. God knows what pang it will be to part from you; but I must not leave my women children: I must gain the custody of them by sacrifice, by persuasion, by moderation; even, if it must be—God help me!—by art. Boys, do you hear me? do you understand what I mean?" Rothes, all his homely features trembling and eloquent with emotion, answered, "Yes, mother," with the self-command of

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a hero. Hugh, on the contrary, burst from her in a tempest of youthful passion. Now, when the bonds of natural affection were disrupted and broken, it was gall to the youth's vehement spirit to feel himself under control. He his father's property! —*he*, a man, a human creature, able to judge for himself, whose best feelings that father had outraged! Had any one said it but my lady, Hugh's rage would have been without control.

"Oh! mamma, don't think of us, think of yourself," said the weeping Evelyn; "we will do everything you wish us to do: Hugh is only angry because he is so ashamed, so distressed; and as for Edie and me, mamma, no one in the world can take us from you: oh! not my father, not my father! he has done very, very wrong, but he would not do that." This most natural and simple allusion struck suddenly, as the simplest things do, to the heart of every one present. The father, the head of the house—he who had been an authority to them all, the familiar, endeared, daily companion, loved and obeyed through all the years of these children's life —that they were suddenly separated from him, cast asunder, planning for the division of the family, the desolation of the household hearth! The thought struck upon them all like an agony.

"Oh! Evie, Evie! your father!" cried my lady, with a great sob of anguish. He was gone, lost, departed from them; their union had come to a bitterer conclusion than any that can be made by death.

CHAPTER VII.

After the first announcement of the misfortune which had happened to them all, Lady Umphraville spoke no more of her husband nor of her own plans. Their ordinary life went on again after its usual fashion; common occupations and occurrences beguiled the young people out of their first distress, and they gradually came to forget that anything had disturbed the even tenor of their life—only there were no letters, no messages, no expectation of Sir Philip's return. The father had dropped out of the family firmament; he had written once or twice, making a forced excuse for going abroad; then he had written formally and angrily about some matters of business, announcing that he was quite uncertain as to the time of

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his return, and then all correspondence ceased. Left to herself, my lady altered nothing of her common manner of life; she lived like a widow, avoiding all inducements to enter into general society, declining invitations and giving none; but her household and daily habitudes remained unchanged. The curiosity of the country could gain no advantage from the composed and dignified demeanour of Lady Umphraville; she left no possible ground for questioning, but lived on, sustaining herself, seeking no sympathy, making no complaint, keeping her injuries, her fears, and her griefs beyond the reach of vulgar pity. Midsummer came and went without any occurrence; autumn and the harvest ripened around Heathcote. One day, in the height of August, the heat had drawn a steaming, stifling white mist over all the downs; there was nothing to be seen of the sea, which, in ordinary times, lighted up the whole horizon; nothing of the green slopes and great white semicircular *scaurs*, like the stamp of a burning hoof, with which the hilly country round was marked and individualized. The utmost extent of the view was the lawn and flower-garden before the windows —everything else was mist, white, hot, and stifling — mist which rose upward from the air, and slanted away upon the faint wind in clouds of visible vapour, blotting out both earth and sky. Nevertheless, the windows were opened, and Edie sat outside with one of her lesson-books, declaring, at intervals, that she "could not get on," and that it was "too warm for anything." Evelyn, who took her conscience into all her occupations, was within, diligently and carefully gumming in some new specimens to her botanical book. My lady was walking in the garden: her dress was of bright-coloured satin, the softest and glossiest; her neck and arms, as usual, were veiled with delicate lace and muslin; her beautiful, abundant hair had no covering but a pretty lace cap; she was walking quietly round the flower-borders, pausing now and then, as it seemed, mechanically, to prop up a flower, or pluck off a withering leaf. Her thoughts were not among the flowers; but she was so much possessed by the use and wont of all those simple duties that she stooped to them unawares. "Mamma," cried Edie, only too glad to have her attention distracted from her lesson—"Mamma, there's some one coming up the hill." My lady started slightly, turned round and listened—seeing was impossible; but she bent her ear so earnestly that it brought the colour to her face. She could not but be alarmed, in spite of herself, at any unseen approach;

the bark of Hugh's favourite dog at night, in spite of her sound nerves and constant self-control, threw her always into a fit of trembling: her husband might return at any moment, and then must come the crisis—the beginning of a changed life. Edie threw down her book joyously, and ran to a little wicket-gate, from which the approaching equipage could be seen as it passed to the grand entrance. Thence she was heard immediately hailing the new-comer—"Oh, grandmamma! oh, please get out here—it's soonest! Oh, wait a moment—I'll run and tell them all!" and the little girl came bounding back along the path, calling aloud, "Mamma, it's grandmamma! Oh! Evelyn, such fun! It's grandmamma! Where's Harry? where are the boys?"

Grandmamma was a great favourite with the young people, and Harry was her special pet and expectant heir; Evelyn left her herbarium immediately, and came springing out through the open window to join her mother; but my lady stood still where Edie's first words had arrested her,—her face paling, her breath coming quick, and a look of resentment and haughty reluctance, which Evelyn had never seen there before, stiffening her features. Though she had subdued herself so much, she was still human: she might even have received her husband himself with less offence and indignation than she received her husband's mother; he had injured her too deeply to make any degree of personal resentment sufficient for the case, but it needed more than mortal patience, and was not in the nature of fallible woman, to forbear from resenting his sin upon his friends. There was, however, no time to consider the matter,—grandmamma followed Edie after a few minutes' interval. She was a lively old lady of about seventy, rather more gaily dressed than became her years; she was an old lady "of high principles:" "feeling," it was commonly understood, was not to be expected from her; and the majority of people got on a great deal better with old Lady Curtis in consequence of this understood and acknowledged deficiency. She had married twice, and was now the wife of another Sussex baronet—an old man invalid and incapable, who had a great respect for his clever old wife: she was understood to have no particular sympathy with any one, but to be a thoroughly sensible, practical old woman of the world, competent to give advice upon things in general, and held in much esteem by country gentlemen in particular. The boys delighted in her frankness, which made no pretence

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of sentiment or goodness beyond "the strictest propriety;" and even Evelyn liked the lively talk of her light-hearted ancestress. Lady Curtis had been abroad,—she had not seen her son's forsaken wife since Sir Philip's departure; she might have been reasonably expected to show some embarrassment: she did not, however, but, coming frankly up to her, reached up on tiptoe to kiss my lady's cheek; and, patting her with her hand on the other, said, "Well, Nelly! Nelly! what a horrid business! how have you managed to get over it, you dear, good, soft-hearted creature? *I* might have made the best of such a sad affair, but, good heavens, *you!*" My lady withdrew herself hastily from the embrace of her mother-in-law.

"If you have come to talk of *that*, this is not the place!" she answered, with a good deal of *hauteur*. Evelyn, a born peacemaker, kept behind her mother, trying, with her soft dove's eyes, to communicate to grandmamma something of the great youthful sympathy and reverence for suffering which was in her own unselfish heart: Evelyn felt it very hard to look on and be unable to interpose. Oh! why would not people be kind to each other? why did not grandmamma feel for mamma? why did not mamma remember grandmamma's character? My lady recovered herself while her daughter pondered. "Evelyn," said Lady Umphraville, "Lady Curtis would probably like to see your brothers, and will stay luncheon, perhaps; I have something to say to Gregory; don't wait for me, pray."

"My love," said the old lady, "I quite understand how you feel,—you've made up your mind to quarrel with every one belonging to Philip: it's perfectly just and proper, and I don't blame you; but we're old friends, Nelly, and you must not 'Lady Curtis' me. There, Evie, child, run in: your mamma and I have a great deal to talk of; and keep off the boys for half an hour, do! Say I came to see my lady; and John can put up the horses, if he's a mind. I don't mean to go away directly after luncheon, like a stranger, because my son has made a fool of himself. Now, Evelyn, go away." Half frightened to leave them, half believing that they were likely to come to an understanding when left to themselves, Evelyn went away. My lady and her visitor remained alone in the garden; the thick white atmosphere closed round them, setting forth its fringe of shrubs and boughs, like a frame for the picture,—my lady, offended, indignant, silently resentful; and the other, talking eagerly, reaching up to the loftier stature

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of her companion, gradually re-establishing the old habit and influence of friendliness. The gay old woman, sharp, small, and active,—the younger and far fairer figure in those soft, simple, glistening robes; the disturbed and troubled aspect of the human atmosphere about them, so different from this breathless tropical heat out of doors; even the shadowy trees, breaking out of the mist like half-seen listeners; and Edie and Evelyn, pausing to look wistfully out of the drawing-room windows, each at a different point,—added to the completeness of the scene. My lady walked on a few steps when Evelyn left them—so did her visitor; and then Lady Curtis tapped Lady Umphraville sharply on the arm, which was a fashion she had, and said, with some abruptness, "Nelly, you're a sensible woman; what do you mean to do?" Having no immediate answer, the old lady went on hastily. "I understand your feelings perfectly well, my dear, as I have told you; because I am his mother, you think you are bound to make an enemy of me: nothing can be a greater mistake, Eleanor. I am not an effusive person: I don't pretend to talk of your wrongs or of my sympathy; neither do I expect any outbreak of jealous rage or passion from you: you are a woman of sense and experience—so am I: I want to know what you intend to do."

My lady was much too natural a woman to answer with composure, or to take the cool, common-sense, practical view of the matter suggested by her mother-in-law. Feelings which, with all the strength of her nature, she would have restrained in presence of Sir Philip, forced their natural outlet upon his nearest relative: the forsaken wife trembled with resentment and indignation. "I cannot enter upon the subject," she said quickly; "when Sir Philip returns, he shall know at once what I intend to do: till then I mean to do nothing."

"Very well," said Lady Curtis, "very well! I am glad to hear it: I approve of that. Such a piece of folly, such a preposterous, unintelligible infatuation! for they must both have known very well that you could not divorce him. It is really quite frightful to think of such madness!"

The deep blush of matron shame and offence rose over my lady's face: she turned away with a gesture of impatience and disgust. Madness, infatuation, folly,—these were light words; but her cheeks burned and her heart revolted at the idea thus brought before her. She arrested the further remarks of her visitor with a hasty exclamation: "I have no desire to enter

into what they must have thought; it is not a subject to be discussed before me. I have no one to consider in the matter but Sir Philip, and my arrangements with him can be quickly made. I think we had better at once leave a subject which cannot be very agreeable to either of us."

"With all my heart, my dear, if there was not something else concerned," said Lady Curtis; "but don't you know, Eleanor, her husband has commenced proceedings against him." The blood rushed back upon Lady Umphraville's heart with a sudden pang; she clasped her hands tightly together with an involuntary motion, to balance somewhat the sharp stroke upon her mind: it was not envy that "*her* husband" had means of relief at hand, over which "*his* wife" had no power; it was a sudden, intolerable realization of disgrace, humiliation, and misery to everybody concerned; of the brand of shame unbearable upon the name borne by her sons; of the horrible chance of details and circumstances reaching even her own ears in her solitude, reaching, worse than her own, the ears of the children,—of Hugh and Evelyn, young man and young woman. The pure-minded mother bowed herself with a shame and humiliation unknown to the guilty. Strange enough, this necessary adjunct to the original calamity had not occurred to her before.

"Her husband, of course, will get a divorce," said the old lady, who had watched keenly all the changes of her countenance; "but you, Nelly, have no such power. Men and women never will be equal so far as laws are concerned: vice itself, however deplorable, is not so bad in a man; they have a hundred temptations which we are never aware of. A woman knows that when *she* goes wrong, it is unredeemable; but a man has no such safeguard. Then, Nelly, we women have the highest rank in one way; when *we* err, we injure the general morality far more than can be done by a double error in a man: it stands to reason that the woman should bear the greatest punishment. I am ashamed, amazed, at Philip; I trust he will not dare to look either of us in the face for a year or two to come; but after that, Nelly, I cannot believe that you will act the part of a Queen Eleanor; you can't divorce him, and, after all——"

Once more Lady Umphraville raised her hand in a hurried motion of intolerable impatience. "I have said already that I have nothing to say in the matter," she cried hurriedly: "when Sir Philip returns I shall make all necessary arrange-

ments with him; with any one else besides Sir Philip I have nothing to do: I can hear nothing of any other person; I refuse to hear anything! such discussions are not for me."

Lady Curtis took a moment's time to consider. To find herself offended by this disregard of her counsels would be a very good way of breaking off intercourse, which had the chance of being somewhat embarrassing,—that was one view of the subject; but, on the other hand, by taking offence, she would shut herself out from any share in the management of an interesting, attractive, and difficult dilemma, and lose all the influence which she might be able to exert in the cause of her son. Grandmamma thought better of the matter, and was not offended. "Very well, my lady," she said; "it is as you say, a most disagreeable subject, and we had better leave it. I'm his mother, you know: *I* can't help feeling for him, poor foolish fellow! but in the meantime let us go to the children: I shall not trouble about this business again."

CHAPTER VIII.

Shortly afterwards, another abominable history found its way into all the papers. There are not many people in England, at any time, bearing the name of Philip Umphraville: friends, enemies, casual acquaintances, village gossips,—all had it in their power to make themselves acquainted with the shame which, desperate offence as it was against themselves, hung heavy on the family of Heathcote. The first journal in the country made use of the "case" in illustration of certain defective points of law. Hugh Umphraville, the heir of the disgraced name, read it greedily, every word, with furious youthful passion; the young man could not tell who it was whom he gnashed his teeth at: his father, his father's miserable and degraded companion, the man whom Sir Philip had injured, the advocates of both causes, the very reporters of them, came in for the youth's violent and undiscriminating resentment; he hated the sight and sound of the name which appeared in dreadful conjunction with his own in every newspaper: a community of injury only seemed to make him hate the more the other family concerned in this terrible domestic drama. This was the most important crisis of Hugh's life: of a temper violent but generous, with no experience to calm his hot blood, and everything to exasperate him, the youth was

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opinions" upon the leading questions of the day. Married people of all degrees and classes she took under her patronage, and was very learned in the causes of matrimonial discord and in the remedies for the same: her regard for youthful love passages was much less urgent, and she was no great match-maker; but the duties of wives and husbands towards each other were her strong point, and the conjugal relation her favourite subject. How husbands were to be won from those amiable sulks in which the animal is prone to take refuge; how wives were to be cured of petulance and pettishness; how one and the other might be led astray by little and little, were topics which she had deeply studied: and a domestic feud was the favourite sport of the lady, who felt at all times the importance of her own interference as the judicious friend of both parties, seeing over their heads, as a spectator fondly fancies, the consequences to each. Lady Umphraville's present position was a tempting lure to Miss Latimer; she had hastened at once, on hearing of it, to bring comfort, advice, and sympathy to her afflicted friend. And knowing my lady's mind, constitution, and temper, it is easy to reckon the amount of gratitude with which these friendly and disinterested services were received. Miss Latimer had been for some time in the North-country for the benefit of sundry simple rural relatives there, and came now direct from an old Northumberland country-house, where Susan Mitford, an heiress of moderate possessions, had been brought up with her grandmother. Susan was eighteen: the good country-folk thought it very expedient that she should see a little of the world, and accordingly confided into the experienced hands of Aunt Margaret the fresh little North-country rose.

Their arrival was a very fortunate occurrence for the young Umphravilles; perhaps it was even well for my lady, who had already found quite time enough to think over her changed condition. Evelyn fell into a sudden and most tender friendship for Susan, who was very willing but not quite up to the romantic mark; and Hugh, whom no one could have suspected of such a fancy, and whose tastes were supposed to take a super-elevated and heroical direction, appeared suddenly charmed out of himself and his evil thoughts by the most natural wise simplicity and sense of the young visitor's blue eyes. The young man fell straightway into that first bright holiday of youth, wandering over the country with the two girls, showing Susan all the familiar landscape, enjoying in her

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presence, the air, the winds, the sunshine, with a cordial and delicate pleasure which he had never found in them before. Yes, it very often "comes to nothing"—yet one remembers that first dawn of life, with all its vague suggestions, the throng of possibilities, cherub cupids, happily undistinguishable, half seen and half lost in the general light; the journeys, or the walks, or the talks, in which some one was present who might possibly be the mystical somebody who dwells in every youthful imagination, some one who was pleasant to look at, pleasant to speak to, delightfully surrounded with an ideal haze of pleasant excitement and disquietude, and who might be—possibly who might be——. Pleasanter than real courtship, more delightful, with its vague charm and attraction, than anything ascertained,—this was the time of youthful holiday and leisure which fell suddenly, like a blessing out of heaven, upon the troubled soul of Hugh.

Aunt Margaret was established in the special guest's chamber,—the state-room of Heathcote. She had scarcely taken possession of it, when she came behind my lady—who, seated in an easy-chair, looked on at the arrangement of her friend's books and papers—and, putting her arms round her neck and bending her own face over my lady's shoulder, whispered, "My dear Eleanor! my poor love! how I have felt for you!" with a tender kiss between each exclamation. My lady started at the words and the embrace. With a sudden burning blush on her cheek, and hot tears in her eyes, she tried to disengage herself: she was not overpowered and melted by the sympathy; her first sentiment, on the contrary, was that of intolerable impatience at the intrusion.

"Now, you know you can confide in me; do confide in me, dear!" said Miss Latimer, coming softly round to her side and kneeling on a footstool close by her: "I know how much you suffer, restraining yourself before the children. Oh! I can feel for you. To think that his love is alienated, that you no longer possess his heart,—it must be frightful, killing! and you keep it all in your own poor breast, you faithful wife: you won't upbraid him though he has made you miserable,—I see how it is; but, dear, you might confide in me."

"Hush! hush!" cried my lady; "no further, Margaret: I cannot discuss this subject, even with you."

"No, dear," said Miss Latimer, kissing her once more, "not discuss, only relieve your poor heart,—tell me how you feel about it: I know it must be agony; but to speak will ease

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you. Dear Eleanor, though he has been so infatuated, though it is perhaps wrong of me to bid you think so, still I feel sure he loves you still."

My lady put away the arms which encircled her, and rose with haste and impatience. "You do not understand me; I suppose you cannot understand me," she cried with vexation and shame; "but it is surely enough to say I cannot—I will not, if that is more explicit—speak with any one on this subject. You mean well, Margaret," she continued, growing calmer as she came out of the range of Miss Latimer's eyes, which had been fixed steadily with an undeviating gaze, which, in other circumstances, might have been impertinent, upon her own, "but you do not comprehend my feelings; I am not like you; I am not a girl in love. At my age and in my position, one has motives so mixed and many-sided." My lady paused with growing embarrassment. "Whether my husband loves me, is no question for any one," she added in a very low and steady voice; "to suppose that he does not, is the best one can hope for him, and the least insult to me; but *that* I can permit no one to enter on. You have come to a house upon which a frightful shade of uncertainty rests; you are very welcome, Margaret—but you must submit to the conditions of our life, if you share it; and you must understand that on this subject I can submit to no interference, even from my dearest friend."

"Dear Eleanor, you are excited! sit down, love; let me get you something: you should be soothed and not troubled," said the persevering sympathiser. "There! lie down: let me put this pillow under your head. Interfere! my dear: I came to support you,—to keep up your poor afflicted heart; and I understand your feelings perfectly, though you do not give me credit for it: I can comprehend your impatience, your anger, at hearing any one speak of him. Oh! I know woman's nature well, and how she would try to hide the deepest wound, lest the loved one should be upbraided for it. Yes, dear, you do not need to speak; I know all you could say: don't fatigue yourself now; speak to me just when you are disposed; only be sure I am always ready and most anxious to be a comfort to you as long as I am here."

But even this did not melt my lady. "You understand a great many things, Margaret, but not me," she said, resisting with some impatience her friend's persuasions to lie down. Instead of lying down, she kept standing, rather more erect

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than usual, by the table, evidently desirous of saying something which should put a final conclusion to the controversy, yet restrained by a delicacy pure as a girl's, though far more painful. "One cannot help knowing the terrible sins of this life," she cried at last; "but a home injured by them should be sacred to strangers; and a mother like me, no longer young, has a great deal more to consider than any personal question; therefore there is but little ground open to sympathy. Are you ready to go down-stairs? I see the young people returning to luncheon, and I trust you consent that this conversation should come to an end now." Miss Latimer replied by an affectionate fixed gaze out of her grey eyes and another kiss. Even this silent sympathy did not melt my lady: she went away with many strong and troubled emotions struggling in her heart. With all her enlarged and great anxieties, with the prospect before her of a life altogether changed, and of a partial parting from some of her children, to aggravate the total disjunction from her husband, she could not but receive with an additional pang of ashamed and angry mortification, the sympathy which treated her as a girl might have been treated who had quarrelled with her lover. To say, "He loves you still," was only still further to disgust the pure heart, which could have even more readily pardoned anything done under the excuse of love, than the abominable imagination of a sensual sinner mingling thoughts of herself, a spotless wife, with viler thoughts of others. The common cant of "woman's nature" knew nothing of this sentiment which, notwithstanding, was pure womanly. My lady could make up her mind sadly—but as a thing to be borne—to the total parting of heart and life already made between herself and her husband; but could not, would not—with a burning cheek and indignant heart refuse to submit to the thought that he carried her image into that polluted atmosphere, and entertained love for her and evil passion for another in the same breath. The thought filled her with disgust and horror; but this was altogether out of the comprehension of Aunt Margaret, who still endeavoured, even at this very moment, to increase her own sympathy for "Poor, poor Eleanor!" by imaginations of a desolate and heart-broken woman, whom her husband had ceased to love.

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CHAPTER X.

"The accounts of the Clothing Society—surely. I should have sent them up long ago, my dear Lady Umphraville, if I could have supposed you able for the trouble," said Miss Clarissa Hardwick; "it is so good of you to think of these poor people in the midst of your own occupations: I am sure you show an example to us all."

"For my part, I think it an age since we have seen my lady," said Miss Hardwick, "especially as poor people are given to asking questions, and old Betty Jackson does her washing all the same, in spite of trouble. The old women say, 'My lady's given over coming to the village;' we, who are old women ourselves, and don't know the ways of a family, as they say, have no chance with them. They say, 'It ain't nobody but Miss Hardwick,' and look disappointed when I go to the cottage doors. Quite true, Evelyn: let alone my lady, they'd rather have you than me."

"Indeed, Susan, Miss Hardwick knows quite well it is not so," cried Evelyn, appealing to her now constant companion, "and Minnie knows it too."

"Ah! Evelyn, you forget Minnie now," exclaimed in a whisper that pathetic personage, casting a glance of injured friendship upon the new-comer. Evelyn was confused; it was not easy to deny the superior attractions of her new friend.

"I used to see Evelyn so often, Miss Mitford," pursued Minnie: "sometimes even Mr. Umphraville was visible in Broadmead; but things are *so* changed! I suppose old people are quite right when they say one should not trust in friendship; but one does not like to find it out."

"Oh! Minnie, I am sure I am not changed—and neither is Hugh," cried Evelyn, whose tender heart was touched with a sudden compunction.

Minnie pursued her advantage, especially as she perceived a little curiosity in the face of Susan, and ascertained that Miss Latimer was making a study of her. "Of course, Evelyn dear, I don't mean to say anything about Mr. Umphraville,—a gentleman is quite different; and there is not much at the rectory that Mr. Hugh could care for: still it used to be *so* pleasant—and Broadmead looks quite a different place without *you*."

"Perhaps it is my fault—for Evelyn has been taking me to see all the country," said Susan; who could not help wondering whether there ever had been anything at the rectory to please

Mr. Hugh, but who did not think proper to bring that young gentleman's name into the discussion on her own part.

Minnie did not answer, but she gave the innocent Susan a sharp glance and made her a wicked little curtsey, meaning that it *was* her fault, and she, the injured Minnie, was quite aware of the same. Evelyn perceiving this hostile demonstration, started with eager haste to make peace. "Susan has seen a great deal of the country now, and likes it half as well as Northumberland," said Evelyn; "and we meant to come down to the rectory to-morrow, and had all been talking about it. I was down at the school last week; but indeed, indeed, everything is not so pleasant as it used to be," added Evelyn hurriedly, in a half whisper aside, looking at my lady and growing very red: "I do not want mamma to go, for it would vex her to hear the people speak."

"Dear Evelyn, come and tell me all about it," whispered Minnie in return, kissing her friend and leading her off to the window. Susan, who had not been brought up among young ladies, who was very sparing of her caresses, and shy of confidential whispers, turned away a little disappointed and mortified in her honest girl's heart. She, with natural delicacy, would not have touched upon the family misfortune by the remotest implication, not for the world. Susan began to be very fond of her pretty young companion, and naturally entertained an instinctive hostility to Evelyn's older intimate; and then Mr. Hugh —who used to go to Broadmead, and whose absence Minnie felt herself at liberty to regret. Altogether, Susan felt somewhat uneasy, moved to curiosity and speculations; especially as she blushed, with an immediate perception of how ridiculous it was in her to marvel and be surprised at any friendship between the young lady at the rectory and Mr. Hugh.

"I have just been ordering the flannel for Christmas," said Miss Clarissa; "I thought you might not be able to take the trouble, and that it was better to do it myself; but now that we have the pleasure of seeing you so well, I am quite sorry I did it; only I supposed you would not wish to make any difference from other years."

"It is very strange," said my lady with a little impatience; "I have not been ill, and I have sent for these accounts half-a-dozen times. But what did you say, Margaret?"

"Only that every one feels so much sympathy for you, my dearest Eleanor," said Miss Latimer, "and it ought to do you good."

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My lady rose hastily and went to the other end of the room to fetch something; it was a habit she had acquired since the arrival of Miss Latimer, for Lady Umphraville had unfortunately not only a mind and will, but even a temper of her own. She came back with a little drawing in her hand. "This is Evelyn's idea for the new school," she said, laying it down on the table. It was a pretty little impracticable sketch, as might have been expected, but it was enough to direct the conversation into another channel.

"I am sure I think it quite pretty; that little porch is so nice," said Miss Clarissa; "but I trust you will not think of beginning it till you see the rector: we have all been so vexed and annoyed about the restorations; and my brother does so depend upon you, only—I can't tell why—he will *not* come to Heathcote."

"Heathcote must come to him then, I suppose," said my lady with a constrained smile. She knew very well that her visitors remembered his last visit to Heathcote as well as she did, and understood perfectly well why the shy, kind-hearted rector declined to come again.

"I should just like to see Evelyn's sketch made into stone and lime," said Miss Hardwick, holding it up at a considerable distance from her to suit her eyes. "Come here, child, and tell me why this porch is all for training honeysuckle over; how do you think it would look with all the clogs standing a-row in it, and old Widow Hutchin's big umbrella dripping in the corner? And the chimneys, Evelyn; how in the world do they get up there? Why, your school would smoke like the new vicarage at Dearham,—as good as putting out the children's eyes."

"Oh! I never thought of chimneys; I suppose the people that build them do that," said Evelyn, who was not sorry to be disturbed in her *tête-à-tête* with Minnie; "and as for the porch, Miss Hardwick, it might just as well be pretty, in spite of the clogs."

"We've got quite an excitement in the village," said Miss Hardwick, putting down the drawing, "something to talk about. What do you think, my lady? The rector is quite nervous and solemn about it; thinks it persecution, —excellent man! I say it's very good fun. There's a fiery dissenter come to Broadmead from some Salem Chapel or other, and there's to be no church-rate: there's news for you!"

"After the restorations were begun," said Miss Clarissa

solemnly; "and I quite agree with my brother; if ever there were emissaries of Satan!—though there is no doubt we need a little trial sometimes, to show us where we stand."

"And the worst of it all is," said Miss Hardwick, laughing, "that the man's a draper, and we deal with him. Clarissa had actually ordered your flannel before he showed the cloven foot. Frightful! isn't it?—dissenting petticoats! I should not wonder if Betty Jackson deserted church whenever she put hers on: Betty's a highly sympathetic person. I don't think it safe, for my part."

"But don't you think the dissenter is quite right, if he is conscientious in his opinions?" said Miss Latimer, gravely taking it up as a matter of principle.

"Right! to oppose a church-rate? I really cannot listen to such revolutionary sentiments!" said Miss Clarissa.

"Right to be a dissenter?" said Miss Hardwick, laughing. "I've no objections; but not to delude Clarissa into buying sectarian flannel, which may make quite a heresy in the place, for aught we know,—that's the shabby part of it. However, we are going to bestir ourselves: you're wanted, Evelyn, for a school-feast next week. We're going to be wise as serpents, my lady; full time, you may suppose, when emissaries of Satan are among us."

"What strange delusions!" said Miss Latimer, who had been gazing with her fixed eyes into the face of each speaker. Miss Hardwick only laughed again at this utterance: the student of character could make nothing of her.

"And I trust we may look for—not only the young people, but yourself, my dear Lady Umphraville," said Miss Clarissa; "I should not have ventured to ask you, but that I see you *so* well. We wish to make quite a demonstration: the rector will examine the children, and there are some prizes for them; and Mrs. Hastings and Sir John and Lady Shoreham and Lord Bognor and the Honourable Miss Chichester have already promised to come. Do pray join us; and we should be delighted to see Miss Latimer."

My lady coloured and hesitated—all the more that Aunt Margaret immediately turned the close artillery of her observation upon her. "Evelyn shall go," said my lady; "but I do not go out at present, thank you: I wish you a very successful demonstration, but I'd rather not come. No, pray, Miss Clarissa, I had much rather you did not ask me; but Evelyn shall go, and Susan, and Hugh, I dare say; and per-

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haps Miss Latimer may be persuaded to join them. I shall be very well represented, though I do not go myself."

"But why should you not go yourself?" said Miss Latimer. "My dear Eleanor, you quite mistake; you are the wronged person: no one in the world can have a less opinion of you."

"My lady thinks the dissenting draper very small deer," said Miss Hardwick, with her ready laugh: "never mind! there is no saying what we may come to yet; but in the meantime, Clarissa, it is time to go, is it not? and, Evelyn, bring down your honeysuckle porch with you, there's a good child!"

"I do *so* like a school-feast; don't you, Evelyn? the children enjoy themselves so; and I trust we may have the pleasure of seeing Miss Mitford," said Minnie, with another spiteful little curtsey at Susan; "perhaps Mr. Umphraville,—it will be quite a novelty to see Mr. Hugh at Broadmead."

Mr. Hugh came in as the party were leaving, and heard this last speech. The young man muttered something in reply, with a violent and angry blush. Susan did not quite understand it. Why did he care for what Minnie said? Was her young cavalier a squire of dames, fickle and faithless? For the innocent country girl did not know the stormy nature which she had just touched with that pure little womanly hand of hers, stilling it for the moment; nor could realize how Hugh's passionate temper found in everything an allusion to the family shame, which galled him to the heart. Presently she gained a little more insight. Miss Latimer did not mean to let so good a subject drop.

"My dear Eleanor, I *must* speak to you," said Aunt Margaret; "it is quite foolish, quite wrong, really perfectly unlike you! Why what have you done that you should shut yourself up so? if you were the guilty person, you could not be more afraid of meeting ——" Miss Latimer turned round in amazement and anger: the violent boy behind her had grasped her shoulder.

"I won't hear it!" said Hugh; "I'll turn any person out of this house who dares to speak so to my mother! I don't mind what you say: you're a woman, I know; you may say what you please, and a man must not resent it; but no one under heaven shall say a word about our shame and misery to my mother! I don't care what you think of me,—I mean it! no one shall stay under this roof an hour who does as much again!"

"Hugh! boy! what do you mean?" cried Miss Latimer,

shaking off his hand and confronting him with her severest female dignity. The youth did not wait to make any explanations; he went off in his youthful fury, almost ready to burst into tears at the end of it, half ashamed of himself, and conscious through all of Susan's wistful look, wondering at him. My lady's countenance changed as he left the room; a vague shadow of fear seemed to cross it. "Hugh is excited," she said; "but he is right; I do not wish to wound you, Margaret; but let there be no more of this again."

CHAPTER XI.

Hugh Umphraville went to his father's library after he had done his best to frighten his mother's guest. The young man was thoroughly dissatisfied with himself, angry with everybody. The great domestic incident which held them all in disquietude had acted unfavourably upon his external circumstances as well as upon his mind: he ought to have been at Oxford, had all been well in Heathcote; he ought to have entered for himself into active life of one kind or another; but Sir Philip's long absence had kept his son's plans in abeyance, and now his life seemed entirely unsettled and all his prospects lost, in a feverish irritation against the world, Providence, and every individual actor in this sad domestic drama. He did not know what to do with himself as he dropped into a chair in the library, supporting his knitted brows upon his hands, and gazing with fiery eyes into a vague future, in which his hand was against every man. Rothes was at Rugby; Harry reading with the rector; but Hugh—who had no mind to join his own equals and compeers, whose guns made havoc in all the neighbouring preserves, and whose presence animated the slumbrous country; scornful, though he loved them, of spending his young manhood with the family of women who filled Heathcote; without occupation, save when, in his better humour, he escorted Evelyn and Susan in their walks and rides, or went out shooting by himself—found nothing better to do now than to consume his heart with perpetual self-contention and doubt of everything in earth and heaven. He sat there in the library in the midst of a very good country gentleman's selection of standard literature, with unopened letters on the table concerning the management of his father's estate, perfectly le, leaning his head forward on his hand, gazing into an

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abstract blank of time to come, and kicking against a world where everything was wrong. He no longer recollected the immediate incident which had called back his passion. Sitting brooding over the whole, he came into a general fever which concerned no one thing in particular. Once he had faith in his fellow-creatures, a noble and exalted estimate of the men whom he looked up to; yet his father—oh! misery, disgust, abomination!—had stooped to all those degrading details with which the very newspapers had shamed his name. Once, he had the reverence and veneration of a chivalrous youth for all women. Pah! his father's companion was a woman, still more meanly and shamefully degraded by these same details than he; seduced—that was the word—but Hugh said it with infinite disgust and contempt and with a bitter mockery. And once, too, he had a child's faith in the God of the Bible, who ordered all things. Was this God's ordering? The boy bewildered his faculties with a blind and furious beating against all these maddening thoughts, concluding upon them with that absolute and pitiless logic of youth which leaves no margin for infirmity or circumstance. He was not a philosophical Hamlet, able to reason on the world-disgust which possessed his soul; but he leaped to a somewhat similar conclusion, chafing at the thought that to leap free of this detested life by one's own act was the act of a coward, and that the only thing to be done was to bear it as one best could: it was rather as one worst could with Hugh Umphraville. He sat gazing into the air, which his heated fancy peopled with a buzz of angry thoughts, shutting his excited ear from all the sounds of nature. He was thus when Evelyn came stealing into the room with tears in her dove's eyes. Poor Evelyn! she had no idea that her tender feminine goodness did her brother less benefit than harm. "Oh, Hugh, dear! if you would only be patient," whispered Evelyn, stealing her arm round his neck. "What good does it do to be angry? It is always sinful—always wrong."

"Stuff! why is it wrong?" said Hugh, freeing himself from the caress. "Do you think I'm a child, to be good because I'm told? Why is it wrong? *You* can't tell: leave me alone, Evelyn, I'll take care of myself."

"Oh, Hugh! you know it's wrong! Oh, Hugh! it's a sin!" faltered poor Evelyn. The poor girl was well enough used to these discussions; but she never had more than her own gentle iteration to say.

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"What's a sin?" said Hugh, moodily. "I say everything in the world's a sin: everything goes in a man's face if he means to do well: everything's a lie! I don't believe in a creature but my mother, and look how she's used; and it's wrong to be angry, forsooth! I'd better be pleased, and take everything for granted, and let any man kick me if he will! That's patience! Evelyn, you know nothing about it: don't talk to me."

"Oh, Hugh! I know we ought to submit to Providence," said Evelyn. "When we're in trouble, it's for our good: the Bible says so, and we ought to yield to Providence; for everything is in God's hand."

"Was it God that made all this misery?" said Hugh, angrily. "God sees better than we do. God saw my mother, blameless, good, an honour to her children, and he brought down shame and humiliation upon her, and placed her so that she does not know what new horror another day may bring. Do you call that just? But it's sinful of me to say that it's wrong—all wrong—that it ought not to have been. What's Providence? It's always Providence when misery comes: it's all talk, Evelyn! there's nothing for a man's mind to rest upon in the whole concern."

"Oh! don't, Hugh, don't! you can't mean it," said Evelyn, through her tears. "God makes everything work for good. Oh! I wish I knew a little better; but don't talk against Providence. *I* can rest my mind upon it, thinking it's all in God's hand: and oh, Hugh, dear! don't talk so,—it's a great, great sin."

"Miss Evelyn, my dear!" said a voice behind, "go away to your good thoughts, like a sweet bird: it will be a deal better for Mr. Hugh to have it out with me."

Hugh sprang to his feet with indignation, and even Evelyn turned round with burning cheeks, half ashamed, half angry, at the interruption. "What do you mean stealing in eavesdropping here?" said young Umphraville, furiously. The intruder stood his ground with perfect calmness: he was a man about fifty, strikingly tall, large-limbed, large-featured, but spare as a savage; his complexion was that of a man much out of doors; his large, lean, muscular hands as brown as an Indian's; his eyebrows drawn together, with that look which the poet describes "knitting of his brows, before the glaring sun;" his whole aspect that of one constantly in the open air, constantly in action, yet slow and methodical as a

tiller of the soil. It was easy to perceive at a glance, that none of the professions of artificial civilization belonged to him; that his was some one of the trades of nature, familiar to sun and wind, to storm and rain. He stood before the young people, anything but an inferior, yet not exactly an equal. He met the fiery glance of Hugh with the composure of a man who had no occasion to fear it; yet his calmness was entirely without indifference, and after the first surprise, Evelyn turned towards him appealingly, holding out her little white hand, and relapsing without concealment into her quiet weeping. Without making any reply to Hugh, the new-comer caressed in his own great hand the little fingers of Evelyn.

"Ay, ladybird, ay! it's the best you can do—and maybe they'll wipe out a blot here and there—such tears! but leave your brother to such likes as me, and let my lady know that Foster's here."

"Oh! mamma will be glad," said Evelyn, and she ran out of the room to tell my lady, her tender heart eased for the moment. Foster, for his part, drew a chair to the table, and placed himself opposite Hugh. The young man dropped moodily into his seat, and said nothing, for it was clear that this personage was not one to be questioned rudely.

"My young gentleman," said Foster, "do you know you owe me an apology? Eavesdropping is no word to say to a man of as good blood as your own; but shake hands, we're old friends."

"Friends! I have no friends! I want none," cried Hugh. "What makes you come here? another! to see how we bear it. Yes, I'm angry; I have a right to be: you at least might leave us alone."

"My boy, will you fight me if you won't shake hands?" said Foster, with a comic inflection in his voice, which gave the finishing touch to poor Hugh's patience. He started up, lifted his arm furiously; the stranger rose to meet it, raising himself slowly to his full height, with a singular dignity of motion. Poor Hugh Umphraville, bitterly ashamed of himself, dropped his clenched hand, and stood humbled before his old friend, like a boy as he was; whereupon Foster grasped his hand heartily, "bore no malice," and bade him "sit down like a man and have it out."

"Speak, man! don't choke," said the north-countryman. "It's all the blame of Providence, is it? My boy, would you have had Sir Philip living on like a true mate to my lady,

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with *that* in his heart?" Hugh looked up startled, but made no answer; his visitor proceeded: "If it had not been *in* him, it could not have come *out* of him. I'd rather have it out," said Foster. "There's many things go to the making of all things. A man never goes astray all of a sudden, without ever a thought of harm before. So, my boy, unless you shift your premisses, I don't see what you'll make of it. Did you think Providence was a policeman, to keep your father in a vain show? No, my lad! and it's little good now, or at any time, kicking against the pricks."

"Foster, no more!" cried young Umphraville. "I would not have borne half so much from any man in the world but you."

"It's more than likely," said Foster, calmly; "but take you my advice and speak it out. There's that sweet little sister of yours, she knows her own faith, the innocent bird; but nought of your wild thoughts, you goshawk! Look you here, Mr. Hugh, don't think you're the superior because you have not her footing: Miss Evelyn has the better of it—and some day or other you'll think on what I say."

"Hush! my mother!" said Hugh, in a whisper. On which announcement Foster rose with the air of a noble waiting for his queen; and queens might have envied the poor north-country gentleman's salutation to my lady—the obeisance of an honest heart.

CHAPTER XII.

John Anthony Foster (he always called himself by both names) was a cadet of an ancient and respectable family of Northumberland. He was very near as old as this century, born in the Peninsular days, when war was warm in everybody's thoughts. Perhaps he might have been a soldier, had not Waterloo put an end to it; for great events, which decide the fate of nations, throw odd effects upon private and obscure life when one finds them out; but John Anthony had no mind to play at soldiers in the dead times of peace. He was brought up liberally, educated well—was, in fact, with more enlightenment, extremely well fitted to occupy such a place as that of his father, who was a stout squire of Northumberland, with an income of between two and three thousand a year. Unfortunately, however, John Anthony was the third in descent

from this respected parent: his elder brother had been as well trained to the profession of squire as he, and so had the second, who inherited a smaller but very comfortable property from his mother. The third son had only his choice of the three gentlemanly professions, and a kindly start in life to look for; but John Anthony was an impracticable rustic. He said himself that he used twice as much air as ordinary men, and that it was cruel to send him to a town, where already there was little enough of that indispensable element. He was the frugalest, the most temperate, the least extravagant of men: but what is to be done with a young man of good birth and no property, who will neither be a priest, a doctor, nor a soldier, who wants twice as much breathing-room as other people, and who, in short, has been trained to be a country gentleman, and nothing less or more? It quite puzzled the brains of the honest Northumberland household, who knew no Australia, and would have been greatly shocked to have a son of theirs an emigrant. All his brothers and sisters were married before any solution came to this problem; and when it did come at last, in the questionable shape of the marriage of a north-country heiress to a Sussex baronet, Squire Foster was by no means sure that it was creditable for his son to be agent for Lady Umphraville. John Anthony was of quite a different mind: he took the charge with gratitude and enthusiasm, which no one ever guessed or knew anything of, and served my lady, who had delivered him from his dilemma, with the devotion of a knight of romance. Thus he lived the life for which nature and education fitted him—living by himself in the quaint narrow old house which would not have answered very well for a proprietor's family, but did excellently for John Anthony. The estate was not very large, but it was in admirable condition, and this was indeed, in her unhappy circumstances, my lady's great consolation, for she could still live and maintain her children on means of her own. She had prepared herself as well as she could, on her way hither, for this meeting; but when she met Foster's kind steady eye, my lady faltered—almost broke down. He was not a great deal older than herself, but she had known him all her life, and had perfect confidence in him. She knew very well that *he* would not affront her by either consolation or sympathy, and this thought melted the heart which fortified itself in desperate matron pride against sentimental pity. Her eyes filled, her hand shook, she trembled with a sudden access of strong

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emotion: the sight of the stranger seemed to bring back everything before her—her youth, her marriage, Philip;—alas! that impossible Philip, who had lived but in her own vision, and was perished for ever—more than dead. All that she said at last was—"Thank you, I have wanted you very much," as she took the seat which Hugh brought her. The young man supposed he ought to go away, but for that very reason did not move. Unfortunately, at this period of his life, what he *ought* to do, was the thing of all others that Hugh was resolved against. He stood waiting behind my lady's chair; she did not bid him leave her, and he said to himself it was necessary and right that he should remain with his mother.

"Before we speak of anything else, let us clear our minds of the one subject which you are thinking of as well as I, John Anthony," said my lady hurriedly; "I want to know all about Redesdale, how it is settled—I never paid much attention to it—and what my legal power over it is, if it really belongs to me? You must manage it all: we must live upon it henceforward; and—and—you must find out for me, in my necessity, how it can be done—for we cannot remain here."

"My lady, will you come to Redesdale?" asked Foster.

She paused an instant before she spoke: it seemed to rise before her, that strange old lonely house, with its eyes turned to the moorlands. "I think not—I could not!" said my lady. "No, it is not like Evelyn and Edie—and so far away too; no, not to Redesdale—somewhere near."

"Why somewhere near? is it not best to be out of reach—beyond annoyance?" said John Anthony, pressing his question. He had a very high opinion of my lady, but he thought, after all, she loved him, and her heart yearned to her guilty husband still.

"I must sometimes see my boys," said the mother, her words coming slowly. "Hush! don't say anything, Hugh: and rights—what rights have I? None? I must know." What Foster said in return it was not easy to hear, but all that came to my lady was something about "a suit" and "ecclesiastical courts." "No," she said, quickly; "no, there has been enough made public: no, whatever we must suffer, let it be in silence. It must not be law—they say a woman has no law to support her—it must be all arrangement and agreement, and no contest."

"Confound the law!" burst forth Foster. "I beg your pardon, my lady, but, hang them all! why can't you divorce

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him, and be done with the miserable business? Patience! I'll not say another word."

"I cannot see what better I should be," said my lady, the high colour which had flushed over it fading from her face. "Law is terrible, but so is nature: I must bear the same name as my children. It must all be arrangement, as I said."

"Arrangement! Do you know there's no such thing recognized in law, my lady?" said Foster. "Do you know a man can't make a covenant with his wife; or, if he makes it, can break it to-morrow? It's void—it's illegal. Is this what you would trust to? or do you know?"

"Yes; but I know he is not a villain," said my lady, in her low, constrained, painful voice.

Her agent looked at her earnestly, with that kind of impatient, affectionate, doubtful look, which men who respect them sometimes cast upon women. He knew she was as immovable and beyond reason in that conviction of hers, as though such a breach of faith had never been: he was angry and vexed that she should be so, yet at the same time admired her for it, and felt she was right. "Well, my lady, take your will," he said, shrugging his shoulders; "it's out of my way, but I'll attend to it. I suppose that's all I ought to say."

"That is all," said my lady, rising eagerly. "It is far better, far best that there should be no opinion spoken: we are old friends. I know what you think; say nothing, John Anthony—you know me."

"It's all very well to say so—I don't!" said Foster. "Never mind—it's all one: I'll do what you tell me; woman's inscrutable! Am I to take my staff and depart, my lady, thankful I've got no broken crown from Mr. Hugh; or what's your pleasure? for here I stand, that have walked twenty miles this day."

"Walked! why?" said my lady, taking her old friend's arm to go upstairs.

"For diversion," said Foster; but my lady knew it was because her faithful friend and servant had to calm down his indignation and resentment, before he came into the presence of the deserted wife. Perhaps a perception of the same came to Hugh's mind as he followed them out of the library: his mother's words had struck the young man deeply. His own ungovernable passion shrank into something slight and boyish, in comparison with her calmness. Nature! was nature itself

hard, terrible,—an inflicter of inevitable sorrows? He chafed at the thought, as was natural, yet it touched him. One can resent the injustices of law, but one cannot so well resent when one perceives that nature herself, who blesses all, makes certain calamities inevitable. Was this the truth?

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSAN MITFORD was all by herself in her chamber. The window was a pretty lattice window, wreathed with jessamine, which still dropped its pensive, aromatic flowers, like white snow-flakes, on the sill; and pretty was the girl's face, looking out over the slopes of the downs and the fertile belt of south land lying between this height and the full sea; but Susan's candid face was full of unacknowledgeable trouble. She could not say to herself how it was that she turned away sick from the peaceful scene before the window, wishing in her heart that she had never seen it, and longing for the northern moors: somehow she did not long for them either, as she might have done, but thought upon her old life with good old grandmamma, as if it had been two years at least, instead of only two months ago. Other interests, even in so short a time, had roused the child's heart in her: coming into close contact with some of the great serious mysteries and troubles of this troubled life, was like to wake up a thoughtful mind. Then, though she did not like to confess it, she was pained about "Mr. Hugh." Was it the last burst of a lover's quarrel with that young lady at the rectory which exploded upon Aunt Margaret? Was it not very "wrong" of him to indulge in such outbreaks of temper, or might it be natural indignation, aggrieved love, strained to the utmost? Susan had mind sufficient to take in this last alternative; but still she did not approve, and was much disturbed in her mind, trying vainly to persuade that same mind, which was a very honest and straightforward one, that grief for my lady and for Evelyn had the principal share in her trouble. So she stood wistfully looking out, thinking how different it used to be at Mitford Place, with the little circle of village people to be kind to, and nothing more startling within-doors than the frequent calls of the cozy rector or a game at romps with all his children; where grandmamma's knitting was the serious web of existence, and Susan's books, and music, and bits of fanciful work, its

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embellishments; and where, moored far above life's common trials, in the security of extreme age and extreme youth, even hearts so full of tenderness as these could live in a tranquil unconscious selfishness, knowing no evil. Susan now, disturbed with a crowd of anxious sympathies, could not but marvel—looking back upon grandmamma—whether the calm old lady knew anything of the troubles of this life, into which she had sent her child. And, doubtless, she had known her share of them,—that placid, silver-haired old lady; but with the unreasonable, invincible, dear foolish hope of humanity, never feared these black phantoms for her nursling, to whom remained a radiant fate. It was just at this point of her meditations that Susan heard a voice below, which startled her. There was no mistaking the Northumbrian R, as it rolled from John Anthony's capacious throat: it startled her into an immediate flutter of pleasant excitement, as opposite as possible to her youthful moralizings. She longed immediately to hear all those little bits of personal news which cannot come in letters; to hear even the names spoken with their native purity of accent, the familiar names which she had known all her life. Her heart beat quick and her face dimpled over with smiles—she who had just been thinking of mysterious life and all its burdens, and marvelling at the quietness of the Place, where no trouble was; but the Place was home, and her heart thrilled at its familiar voice. She ran down-stairs with innocent haste and expectation; she made no pause to think of Mr. Hugh, though that troubled and misanthropical personage crossed her on the way, but ran almost into John Anthony's arms, as he stood in the drawing-room waiting the summons to lunch, which the stranger thought rather slow of coming. Susan did not mind even Aunt Margaret, who sat there with the least shade of gravity and offence upon her; but, seizing the new-comer's hands, cried out, "Oh! John Anthony, I am so glad to see you! have you been at the Place? have you seen grandmamma? is all well at home?

"Ay, Muirflower! so this is you, grown to look like a southland lady all in a day," said Foster, holding her soft rounded hands in his big one: "are you good to her in these parts, Miss Evelyn? for she's the light of the eyes at home."

"Oh! Susan, are we good to you? it is she that is good to us!" cried Evelyn, whom this visit had filled with vague forti-

tude and comfort; "but we all love her dearly at Heathcote: you know we do."

"I thought it more than likely," said John Anthony. "Ay, ay! never mind: all's well; grandmamma safe and sound, but dreary; the Place aye in its old quarters, ten miles south of Cheviot, three miles east of Redesdale; all the old bodies in the village just the same; the crops pretty fair and all in. There! that's what I call a true chronicle of a countryside."

"Oh! hush, John Anthony! tell me right," cried Susan; "why is grandmamma dreary? and how's the rector and Lucy and Walter, and all your nieces and nephews? and did you hear what the new farmer had done on the waste land? Oh! such a shame to all you old-fashioned people. But tell me true; why is grandmamma dull? is it for me?"

"Vanity! vanity! is it likely?" said John Anthony, laughing; "yet old folk that are used to mischief, think long when they want it. I would not say but it might be for you—and other reasons."

"What other reasons?" cried Susan, taking alarm. "Oh! Evelyn, I must go home." To which sudden statement of intention, Aunt Margaret looked up with a comical air of power, not to be described. An odd half smile passed over her face: she said, "Oh, indeed! *must* you?" with great significance within herself. Miss Latimer knew better. Just at this critical moment came the expected summons to lunch, to which John Anthony went forth in triumph, leading my lady, while Susan stood by Evelyn's side pondering the "other reasons." She went down-stairs, talking of it all the way to her gentle companion. "I am sure he does not mean anything," cried that disinterested young lady; "look how he laughs. Oh! Susan, of course your grandmamma must miss you—you have only been six weeks at Heathcote, and we could not *live* without you; you never could be so cruel as to think of going home!"

"I must one time or other," said Susan, with half a blush and half a smile, very grateful to Evelyn's affection, yet aware of its hyperbole; "and if grandmamma is dreary——;" but just then Susan's attention was unseasonably attracted elsewhere: she could hear Hugh speaking as he stalked along before them by Miss Latimer's side, and she could not help hearing what he said.

"I beg your pardon," the young man was saying; "I was

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wrong to address you so rudely. Forgive me: what I said was true, but the manner was abominable,—I beg your pardon."

Miss Latimer turned a look of great compassion and penetrating acuteness upon him.

"You are a very young man, Hugh," she said in a tone of pity, "a *very* young man: I knew you would be sorry for it; but I am not angry, not at all, I assure you; I know human nature too well."

And we are sorry to be obliged to confess it—such a proof of the depravity of human nature as Aunt Margaret did not dream of—sensible Susan Mitford, following close behind, could almost have pinched, or scratched, or pulled the hair of her respectable guardian, on the score of this very reply; and, changing with the facility of a chameleon, longed to have a chance of showing Hugh that she, at least, understood him, and knew what he meant. Susan was quite impatient in her vexation with the unconscious critic of manners and morals who walked before her. We believe the angry little Northumbrian trod upon Aunt Margaret's train out of sheer spite and *malice prepense*, while Evelyn only sighed in her tender heart, and wondered how people *would* try to wound each other. "It would be so easy to be kind," thought poor Evelyn, and she tried her gentle wiles of peacemaking all the time they were at table,—poor little soft-hearted reconciler and healer of wounds! The arrows flew about harmlessly, so far as the real fighters were concerned; but they all made their mark for the moment in Evelyn's tender heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

"And, if it's right to ask, my lady, what is to be done with Mr. Hugh?"

My lady, for the first time in her life, thought John Anthony was going too far.

"What is to be done with him?" she said; "I do not understand you; my son is old enough to judge for himself."

Foster shook his head. "He was to go to Oxford," said the pertinacious north-countryman; "he should have been there a year ago. My lady, take a man's advice for once, and let him go."

"Why?" said Lady Umphraville, with much curiosity and

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a little jealous maternal offence. She was clear-sighted enough, but her attention had not been awakened, and it seemed very natural indeed that Hugh should stay at home under such circumstances, to "take care of his mother." She was proud of the boyish devotion of her son: she repeated "Why?"—curious, but without anxiety, ready for some hint about pretty Susan Mitford, to whom perhaps the young heir of Heathcote might be losing his heart. "My lady, beware how you play with a young tiger," cried Foster; "I know what's in the boy's thoughts,—passion, furious and mad, against his father. Have a care! if he lives here in idleness, something ill will come of it. Them that are most concerned are ever the last to see when mischief brews: I would not have that boy here when his father comes back, no, not for half the kingdom!" My lady rose up with a pallid face, struck white and silent by the words. She, too, had been making her plans, with the ignorance and shortsightedness of common humanity, calculating with a theoretical justice, which was hard enough upon herself, that "the boys" should remain at Heathcote and live with their father, while she sought some safe refuge near, where she could sometimes see them. She woke suddenly from this dream with a start and cry: her soul trembled within her, as many a mother's soul has trembled at the thought of the father and son arrayed against each other; her very heart swooned with fear. Hugh, young, daring, passionate, thinking himself disgraced, refusing common solaces of society or occupation! The whole overwhelmed her in a moment,—what could she do? "John Anthony, take him to Redesdale!" she cried in her first impulse of escape, somehow or any way, from this terrible danger.

"To what purpose, madam?" said her faithful adviser; "he will be as idle there as here,—as much at leisure to make a champion and martyr of himself: my lady, send him to Oxford. Forgive me for saying so of your son; but every young man wants the vanity taken out of him, and he'll get it best done there."

"Ah! John Anthony," said my lady, with a momentary smile of affectionate superiority, "you don't know my Hugh;" but immediately she relapsed again into those terrified and anxious thoughts.

Sir Philip might come home—how could she tell?—this very night: a few hours might burst open a volcano of desperate family feud, wild enough to overthrow in a moment

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those peaceful arrangements upon which all her hopes rested; but the frightened mother forgot her own wrongs, her own plans, everything but the dread of an unnatural parricidal fury gaining dominion over her boy. She had hard ado to compose herself before the anxious eyes of her old friend; she could not see the objects round her, for the glimmer in her eyes of a hundred visionary scenes of strife and violence—conflict between the father and the son. And with it all came a certain humiliation; she, who had now no sure standing-ground but that of mother, had lost sight, in her own private griefs, of this shadow stealing upon her son. The eye of a stranger had been the first to discover it: she was humbled in her own estimation; she no longer trusted her own judgment. John Anthony waited to take his leave of her, after he had delivered his warning: he was on his way to London, to ascertain exactly what the law said in this difficult question; but, important as his errand was, my lady had forgotten it, thinking of Hugh. "Thank you," she said at last, somewhat faintly; "I shall not forget what you have said: I will lose no time—and surely, surely, my boy will obey me!" She said it almost wistfully, looking into Foster's face.

"He will go to the ends of the earth, if you bid him," said John Anthony.

The assurance, though she knew it, cleared my lady's face: she recovered herself and bade her messenger good-bye; then sinking into a chair, when he had left her, sat still, painfully considering the whole,—what was she to do? How long she might have questioned with herself, it is impossible to say; but little light had come upon her thoughts, when the object of them suddenly entered the library. My lady was much startled, but in a moment fortified herself for the task, which had better be done at once. She called Hugh to her, steadying, perforce, the hand which trembled with unusual nervousness: she made him sit by her, and asked him some indifferent questions,—where he had been? what he had been doing? then suddenly grasping his hand, said quickly, "Hugh, my dear boy, you are wasting your youth staying here."

"Yes," said Hugh; he meant nothing in particular by his moodiness, but his mother thought he meant a great deal, and her heart beat still louder.

"Hugh, we must not let everything go," said my lady eagerly; "I would not be so small of spirit as to yield to one misfortune, as if everything else was involved in it: you must

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carry out your former plans without any more delay. I was bewildered not to think of it sooner: you must go to Oxford."

"Now! why? you know I cannot leave you," said Hugh, looking stubborn.

She watched his looks so eagerly, that this new expression put fresh energy into my lady: she *must* conquer. "And why cannot you leave me? am I no longer able to care for myself?" said my lady, plunging boldly into the heart of her subject. "When Sir Philip returns, who am I likely to employ to negotiate with him? not his son, surely! All that is to be done, I must do myself: your own good sense, my dear boy, must show you this; therefore you must not linger here, taking care of me. You shall take care of me," said my lady softly, her eyes filling with tears, and her lip quivering with that smile, "when I am old and useless; but in the meantime, my boy, you must trust in your mother."

"Mother! you are the only person on earth I trust in; and for that reason I can't leave you. I will not leave you!" cried Hugh; "it is the only birthright I value a rush: I have a right to stand by you through all."

And my lady was his mother, and loved him the more for every foolish tender word he said. It was a hard thing to manage. She grew very serious, looked in his face, kissed his hand, though he resisted, and appealed to his dutifulness. "Hugh! my son, my first-born, the pride of my heart! will you be the first to humble your mother? will you not go when I ask you? will you refuse me the first thing, against your own will, I have ever asked you to do since you were a child? Is this the answer you make to me?"

"I will go to the end of the world, anywhere, wherever you bid me!" cried poor Hugh, fairly driven into a corner, and put beyond all his defences.

"I do not bid you go to the end of the world; that would be small advantage to me," said my lady; "but, Hugh, I want my son to be such a man as I may be proud of. I would not have any evil speaker say that family trials deprived *you* of the ordinary advantages of your class. Should *you* like any one to say so? And therefore it is for my sake, for my credit, and that no one may call your mother a selfish woman, absorbed in her own griefs, and indifferent to your welfare, that I ask you to go away."

"Mother! I will go to-morrow, if you choose," cried Hugh.

He said it in the momentary impulse of generous dutifulness, which grieved that it had not even anticipated the request; but,

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for all that, my lady's arguments sounded somewhat specious and insincere, and the young man was not convinced. He *had* acquiesced, that was the great matter; but after this conversation, while my lady thanked God with tears, Hugh went out rambling over the breezy downs, asking himself for what reason his mother wished to send him away. Why was it? He could not answer the question to his own satisfaction, and it was with a rebellious rising of the heart that he remembered how he had pledged himself to go. Wiser people than he, watching my lady during that interval which intervened before his departure, might have come to the truth without much difficulty. When the whistling autumn wind made sounds about the house, pattering among the leaves like footsteps; when the rain fell by night, tingling into the air, with a waste of sound, through which an active fancy could frame whatever particular voice it feared; when the dogs barked, or the great door opened, incidents which always made my lady nervous, her first glance was at Hugh. It was no longer the dead pang, the blood rushing back to her own heart, with which she had been used to anticipate her own meeting with her husband: a wilder fever now throbbed in my lady's veins, and kept her restless. Scarcely a leaf could fall outside, at night, but her anxious gaze sought Hugh. He did not comprehend it, but perceived it, and grew to be restless and feverish himself, like a man under watch—while poor Evelyn looked on, watching both with tearful eyes, guessing at her mother's terror—and the household began to whisper that at long and last my lady was "giving way."

CHAPTER XV.

And in the midst of it all came the school-feast, and the rector's demonstration against the sole dissenter of Broadmead. Well! it is the way of the world—the way of humanity! Your little bits of politics and enmities; your little schemes of amusement—these are the perennial never-failing incidents, which always go on, though the earth quakes and the heavens are falling. Let nobody suppose that the great troubles make room for themselves in the world, and take precedence of pettier matters. No such thing! It is the trifling, the commonplace, even the frivolous occurrences, which go on unchanged, and carry out the scope of nature: it is the fashion of this life! And if you were to suppose that Hugh made

his toilet with misanthropical indifference, that morning, or that Evelyn did not care for her pretty bonnet, you would be much deceived. These young people arrayed themselves with very different sentiments: for Hugh, though perhaps he really thought the whole affair absurd, and felt himself much superior to it, was going, notwithstanding, with Susan Mitford, and by no means intended that she should think him an indifferent cavalier; while Evelyn's innocent heart was moved by the mere pleasure of a fine day, a *fête* in prospect, the unusual excitement of meeting strangers, and a little natural satisfaction in looking very well. She looked remarkably well, in her brown cloak, warmly bound with velvet, and the pretty bonnet, with its warm clusters of ruddy autumn flowers. Evelyn had blue eyes like Susan, but they were the blue eyes of a pensive face, accompanied not with sanguine golden locks, but with dusky silky brown hair, dark and fine and long, like an evening mist. Her dress was simple, like her youth, but very pretty and full of embellishments, as became the period when the girl was nearly woman. And thus the tender heart went forth pleased into the world, which thrilled and tingled with all the possibilities of a new life, neither thinking nor fearing whom she might meet. As for Susan, she, too, had her pretty bonnet, and liked it; but she thought nothing of the people she was about to meet. Perhaps a passing apparition of Hugh danced into the mirror of her blue eyes: how could she help it? she was looking out from her window, and he passing by; and, since the time when she heard his apology to Aunt Margaret, Susan had been full of sympathy for Mr. Hugh. She thought perhaps nobody understood him, and she—she, young, simple, ignorant of herself—she would like to let him know that *she* did, and soothe his unappreciated soul with her kindness; for Susan, though she was sensible, was not so in her own case. The three set out accordingly—not at all as if they came from the midst of the troubles of a troubled household—with Harry and Edie in wild spirits accompanying them, and Miss Latimer, very well dressed and benignant, taking care of the party. When they were fairly gone, my lady came out to the garden by herself, and looked after them as they hastened down the descending road, which, from the lawn at Heathcote, could be seen in all its windings. She drew a long breath of relief as they disappeared out of her sight: she was glad to be alone for a day, to have a little time to think; and presently she drew her cloak about her, and sat

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down upon a garden-chair in the sunshine. Her terror was relaxed for the moment,—she could take a little ease and draw breath. Meantime, there was a great bustle at the school and in the rectory. A magnificent "cold collation," which reflected great credit on the rector's cook, though it was something of a chilly refreshment for the season, made the old dining-tables of the rectory splendid. In the centre was a bouquet of chrysanthemums and shining branches of laurel, arranged with great elaboration by Miss Clarissa; and the linen, the plate, and the glass, were snowy, dazzling, and brilliant beyond description. Miss Clarissa herself, fully equipped in her out-of-doors dress, lingered still to watch the completion and filling in of the table, while Minnie's lighter fingers were scattering precious green-house flowers round the quivering golden jellies and dishes of pastry. The curate's wife had been admitted as a special favour to "see the table," and held up her hands in admiration, too great for speech, at the door; while without stood the excellent rector, exceedingly serious and somewhat troubled by the levity of his elder sister, who was on the lawn with some of the earlier arrivals, and whose remarks upon the occasion Mr. Hardwick did by no means approve. He gave his arm to Mrs. Albany, the curate's wife, with the air of a sufferer for conscience' sake. "Depend upon it, madam," said the rector, "we are playing with a viper; I consider the highest interests of the country are concerned in the stand we make to-day."

This "stand," however, was to commence at the school, where the examination was to take place, and where Miss Hardwick had already led the way. After the examination there was to be a procession of the children to the rectory, to receive their prizes; after which ceremony, those little supporters of the Church were to return to the school, which, in the meantime, was preparing weak tea and buns for their refreshment. The village people turned out *en masse* to see the four carriages, which came shining and prancing along the road: though there were not many of them, they made a great show at Broadmead, especially as the horses of Lord Bognor's coronetted vehicle were high-spirited and restive, and had to be driven round the green to keep them in patience. The Broadmead villagers were very curious about the great people; some of the most enterprising even pressed to the windows of the school to look in, gazing with amazed veneration upon the fine ladies, and delighting their rude senses in the perfume

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atmosphere diffused around them by the wives of two baronets, the grand-daughter of a duke, and the daughter of a viscount, not to speak of Evelyn, Susan, Edie, and Miss Latimer, who were familiar to the rustic understanding.

Mrs. Hastings, who—though she was plain Mistress—was very nearly the greatest lady present, being a woman of fashion and of the above-mentioned ducal descent, had a fashionable party with her, among whom was one person, who, after various suppressed yawns, began to find—as it appeared—an interest in the audience, if not in the proceedings. He was a young man, not more than three-and-twenty, tall, but of delicate frame, with a sensitive and rather haughty face. By some strange sympathy, Evelyn's eye had lighted upon him whenever he entered the little school-room, and Evelyn blushed and dropped her head to see that now he was observing her. She had been separated somehow from her own party. Her grandmother, the clever old Lady Curtis, was found unexpectedly among the rector's guests; and Hugh, with his undutiful spirit, would have nothing to say to grandmamma. What could poor Evelyn do? She had to forsake her own pleasant companions, and establish herself, the peace-maker, at the post of duty. She was all by herself, under the shadow of Lady Curtis's furs and velvets; and, feeling rather forlorn, poor child! as she perceived how happy Hugh and Susan were making themselves, was almost pleased to meet the glance of the stranger. It was not a fashionable stare; it was not at all unlike that first mystical recognition by which the knight of romance perceives his lady. Evelyn's heart beat as she turned her blushing face towards her grandmamma: she forgot that she was helping to make a "stand" against the levelling influences of dissent. And the rector never found it out. The rector, excellent man, examining these little boys and girls of Broadmead with a certain ecclesiastical severity and consciousness of the "occasion," did not look behind him to see how every one was busy with his own proper concerns, and how little any one minded the "occasion." Miss Clarissa looked awful by his side—a champion of the faith; but even Miss Clarissa thought a great deal more about her cold collation than about the threatened assault upon the authority of the Church: while Minnie, who was whispering softly to an ecclesiological guest about "dear uncle Richard's" plans for the Church, and how dreadfully disappointed they should all be if he could not carry them out, had scarcely even that little

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spice of spite against the linendraping dissenter, which kept her aunt Clarissa constant for the truth. The rector was in earnest, after his fashion; which was that of a good man, rather hot of temper, and troubled with perplexities, having within him the perpetual contradiction of a mind prompt to ire and a heart full of universal tenderness; but the little society around him remained comfortably indifferent, amusing itself thus in lack of better amusements.

By-and-by the procession set out, the rector and Miss Clarissa gravely marching on in front, while Evelyn, Minnie, and the schoolmistress marshalled the children behind them. There was good fun in this part of the day's proceedings: the little rogues who were shy and the little rogues who were bold, the boys who laughed to conceal their shamefacedness and the girls who made bobs of acquiescence to every command, but would not move—the mothers waiting outside for a sight of them—the unruly line, which wavered and fluctuated and would not keep straight, amused even the great people. And Evelyn, as she ran about laughing through the broken ranks, coaxing, rebuking, even bribing, them into good order, saw a sight which startled her a little,—one of the last of the flock captured by her hero, who was asking something very softly, in a half whisper. Poor Evelyn! she did not know how sadly the blunder of that moment was to affect her life, nor how the questioner would have turned away from the sound of her name, had he heard it aright; but the little scholar shyly answered "Miss Evelyn," when the stranger whispered his inquiry about the young lady's name; and so, all unawares—nobody knowing anything about it—came the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand. Evelyn, who went on, with a little flutter at her heart, wondered secretly what that secret inquiry was; but feared no more than the smallest little rustic beside her the coming of her fate. The dissenting draper stood at his door like everybody else as the procession passed, and, like everybody else, made his bow to the rector; but great was the importance and secret exultation of this disciple of Salem Chapel. He knew it was all meant to overthrow and cover him with confusion: he had never felt himself so great a man in his life; and, like the rector, with the purest intentions, the man of linen mounted high upon his conscience. No! let those rich people adorn his church for him! the British lion in the dissenting interest roared loftily in the little back shop; no tax for ecclesiastical decorations should oppress the poverty of the

poor people in Broadmead! Justice! the right of private judgment! liberty of opinion! were these grand principles to give way to a little Norman village church which wanted restorations? No! perish open benches, tiled floors, and painted windows! subtle invasions upon freedom of mind and independence of opinion! While the rector marched severely homeward, making a great moral demonstration, the dissenter made another in his back shop, vowing that all the powers of this world—persecution, ruin, the prison, or the stake—should not drive *him* from his post of duty; and that all the gentry and all the rectors in the country should not manage, in face of *his* opposition, to make a church-rate in Broadmead! "Well, Evelyn," said old Lady Curtis, drawing her grand-daughter once more to her side, "how are all at Heathcote? and why doesn't my lady come to countenance the rector, eh? you used to be very good friends."

"And so we are; but mamma did not wish—was not inclined to come," said Evelyn; "and she thought it would do as well if we all came instead."

"Tell your mamma from me," said old Lady Curtis, "that I think her very foolish, making people talk; she had much better go on just as usual. And there's your brother, child, looking at me like a tempest: what's the matter with Hugh?"

"Indeed I don't know, grandmamma: he's out of spirits; he's rather cross sometimes," said Evelyn with a sigh.

"Cross? nonsense! Tell him not to be disagreeable: a young man who indulges his temper is insufferable; nobody in society would have a word to say to him," said Lady Curtis; "and I hope your mother does not encourage him in his ridiculous tempers, my dear."

"Mamma never encourages any one to do wrong," said Evelyn with a little spirit.

"Ah! come to have a little temper yourself, Evelyn? I rather like that," said the grandmamma, laughing and turning round to look at her. "But tell my lady what I say; I can't say it myself, you know: my lady never wishes to see me at Heathcote again."

"Oh, grandmamma! how can you say so?" cried Evelyn.

"Quite true though, my dear, and very natural too," said the old lady; "but tell her from me not to be foolish; and do you remember, Evelyn, that you're your father's child as well as your mother's, and I trust you'll all do your duty, and make no ridiculous exhibition when he comes home."

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"Is he coming home?" said Evelyn, crimsoning to her hair. "Oh! grandmamma, grandmamma! though he's papa, and I love him, I would rather die than see him come home!"

"Which only shows the truth of what I say,—how ridiculous you all are:" cried Lady Curtis sharply. "Die! folly! what is there to die for? But tell my lady, Evelyn, that I trust she'll remember my advice, and not prove herself a true Dame Eleanor, as she seemed inclined to do when I saw her last."

"I don't know what you mean, grandmamma," said Evelyn sadly, yet with some indignation.

"Very possibly; but my lady will," said Evelyn's venerable ancestress.

After which the poor young peacemaker went on solitary by herself, casting longing looks towards Hugh and Susan, but keeping fast to her duty by her grandmother's side. The old woman of the world had been very hard upon Evelyn; but this tender young conscience was very different from the political conscientiousness of the rector and the dissenter. It was not *right* that grandmamma should be alienated and unfriendly; and, hard though it was, Evelyn kept by the gay old heathen who had no conscience, piously endeavouring to do her duty and make peace. "And surely you'll come down to-morrow and see the plans. Oh! pray, Mr. Hugh, don't be cruel!" cried Minnie, "I know you have *such* taste; and dear uncle says we must, on no account, delay with them: it would be a triumph to the enemy!" cried Minnie demurely, but with a glance of half perceptible mockery. "Miss Mitford, do make him come; I did think he had forgotten the way to Broadmead."

"If there's anything to do, I'll come certainly," said Hugh. He did not half like the upbraidings of Minnie, especially as Susan listened; and then Hugh's conscience was unburdened by the smallest consciousness of flirtation: he thought it strangely foolish of the rector's clever little niece.

"Oh! how unkind," cried Minnie; "you'll come if there's something to do, but not to see us. Did you ever hear anything so cruel? I think you had better go to the vestry, then, Mr. Umphraville, for we don't want people who don't care for us, and only come because there's something to do."

"Why, Minnie, what do you mean?" cried Hugh in amazement.

The young lady was overjoyed: at this present moment she did not care a straw for what Hugh thought of her; she was

bent on impressing a certain idea upon Susan. "Minnie? ah! that sounds something like old times," she said, with a sigh. "Now you *will* come to-morrow, won't you? and not *only* because there's something to do."

"Yes, I'll come," said the amazed Hugh. He thought it safest to retire, not knowing what to make of this tender address, even though he left Susan in the hands of the enemy. Then, as he left his own party, Hugh's eye caught that of Evelyn's hero, which wandered after Evelyn. Instinctively Hugh turned to look after him. Who was he? He became pugnacious on the moment. And so the Broadmead school-feast went on to its conclusion, unconsciously thrilling over, with its matter-of-fact feet, the resounding chords of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

This is a very different young lady's chamber from Susan Mitford's pretty room at Heathcote. It is a room at the top of the rectory, intended for an inconsiderable person,—the dependant of the family,—though, in real truth, the retirement and refuge of the dominant spirit of the house. It is an attic of tolerable size and height, but with one side of the roof sloping down towards the broad low window, which throws its light across the sparely carpeted floor at too low a level to be pleasant to the eye. Every piece of furniture in the room is extremely "plain," so plain as to suggest great economy in the furnishing of the apartment, as if it were done on the principle of "anything will do." The carpet is of two different kinds; the hangings, chintz of very old fashion; notwithstanding, it is a cozy little chamber,—one cannot tell why, unless that everything belonging to its mistress has a knack of being made comfortable, especially everything connected with herself. Though the window looks down upon as pretty an English village scene as one could see—the old Norman church, the cluster of cottages, the famous green of Broadmead, where so many cricket-matches have been fought and won, and the grassy line of downs beyond—*this* young lady is not meditating by the window. She has just been leaning out from it, clipping away the intrusive tendrils of ivy which obscured the light; and now she sits by her table, very busy retrimming a dress and making up bows of pretty ribbon

for its adornment. Such bows! her hands go about them so skilfully and quickly, that you see at once, by the confident unhesitating motion of the instructed fingers, how nicely they will be done. And as she works, Minnie thinks—not the gentle reverie of Evelyn, not Susan's womanly and half awakened thoughts. Minnie's mind is broad awake and knows no dreaming: she is thinking about Hugh. Don't be afraid! she is not in love with Hugh; her thoughts are as calm as if he were her grandfather. But Minnie is the daughter of a struggling poor family, where there are a great many children and not very much for them: she knows very well what alternatives lie before her: she must live and work and labour among all these unruly children, must watch them grow up without education, and possibly share in the family descent from that slippery ground of gentility where they now stand; or she must remain in the rectory, satisfied with her influence over her uncle, and less satisfactory power with her aunts; or, finally, she must marry. This latter, on the whole, has seemed to Minnie's practical mind the preferable alternative: in no other way could she be of any service to the children at home, for whom, in spite of all her faults, she keeps a warm heart: and it is the common arrangement of nature,—most people *do* marry, so that Minnie concludes upon it without difficulty. The next question following this is, the person to be married. There were but two people eligible in the neighbourhood of Broadmead when Minnie came to the rectory,—one of them was Hugh Umphraville, the other the Honourable Reginald Chichester, Lord Bognor's eldest son. But our little schemer had a great deal of sense: she could not suppose the daughter of a poor surgeon in Baker Street, even though that daughter was herself, to be a fitting match for the heir of Bognor; she could not have brought little Tom and Willy down to that vast house, with all its grandeur; she could not have received her father and her mother in a world so much out of their range: so Minnie, wise and self-controlled, did not waste a single thought upon the tempting coronet, which seemed almost within her reach, but dedicated her maiden plans and visions solely to Hugh. And now she was thinking. Upon the whole, she had been very indolent, and had made no exertions whatever towards her aim. Before Susan came she had been going on quite in a leisurely fashion, making sure only that nobody else was in the young gentleman's way; now she was really roused and had opened the campaign. She

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was not in the slightest degree jealous of Susan Mitford—she only wished her out of the way; and Minnie made her bows of ribbon with swift, steady, practised fingers, a little exhilarated by the coming effort, and thinking—now that fate seemed to make it problematical—how pleasant it would be to have such a house as Heathcote, in which her little brothers and sisters might see comfort sometimes. For she was not so wicked after all, this worldly-minded, scheming little woman, who meant to marry Hugh Umphraville. She thought her own purpose perfectly justifiable, and not at all unwomanly, so long as nobody knew of it; as, while Minnie was true to herself, nobody had much chance to know.

When she went down-stairs with her pretty bows on her newly-trimmed dress, and a delicate collar of her own work fitting nicely round her white throat, Minnie looked very well, and was aware of it. She had dark eyes, dark hair, and not much colour, but plenty of expression; her lips were red, her eyes bright, her figure graceful and pleasant, her dress always becoming. But Minnie was not a beauty, and put very little faith in her looks, which shows how sensible she was. The plans were on the drawing-room table, around which also were gathered the rectory family, the architect, and Mr. Finial, who was the great authority about Broadmead on all ecclesiological subjects. The architect was a Gothic young man in very good repute, who was reported to have a very refined "feeling" for his craft, and an unlimited acquaintance with "old work." His name was Manifold, which was a great misnomer, for he was as single-minded and "sincere" as his art at its purest period could ever have been, and was young enough to be a little startled and fluttered by the entrance of the young lady whom nobody else paid the least attention to. Mr. Finial had the sketches in his hand, and was poring over them as amateurs will pore, making his gradual criticisms while everybody else wanted to see them. Miss Hardwick, with her great bundle of knitting, sat at one end of the table, hazarding a laugh when she could. Miss Clarissa, more interested, beat towards Mr. Finial, trying to get a peep; while the rector sat by him, looking rather red, severe, and peremptory, which meant that the excellent man was thoroughly puzzled, and confused between two authorities, could not make out what to do. To this party Hugh entered almost immediately after Minnie; but while the ladies greeted the new-comer, the critic went on with his comments. "Bad, sir, bad! I hate com-

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fusion," said Mr. Finial. "Why the church is pure Norman, as any one may see with half an eye: either restore in perfect harmony with the original, or else don't restore it at all."

"The chancel is not Norman, and is extremely pure and elegant of its period," said the architect: "when we have removed that disgusting east window, and filled it in according to my sketch, there will not be a prettier church in Sussex."

Mr. Finial shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it's pretty enough; of course the ladies will like it," said that fastidious authority, throwing down the sketch carelessly on the table; "but a decorated east window in a Norman church is, to my thinking—— Never mind! I daresay it looks very pretty; but if it were mine——"

"What would you do, if it were yours?" asked Miss Clarissa anxiously.

"I should restore the entire chancel, madam," said Mr. Finial, "and then, as my friend here says, I have no doubt Broadmead would be the most perfect little church in Sussex." The rector looked from one to another with perplexity.

"Oh, uncle!" said Minnie, coming to his assistance, "don't you remember what you admired so in that book you were reading the other day—how the difference of architecture was quite a historical record, one part of the building belonging to one age, and the other to quite another? and isn't it *always* more picturesque, Mr. Manifold? Don't you think so, Mr. Umphraville?"

Hugh could not but advance in obedience to the gesture of the pretty hand extended towards him. He came to give his young man's opinion, strongly in favour of the decorated window, while the young architect contemplated Miss Minnie with admiring approbation: *she* had an eye for "the truth," it was quite evident. Miss Clarissa, who had a high opinion of Mr. Finial's judgment, pondered the drawing. Miss Hardwick was rather indifferent; she glanced at it and did a bit of her knitting: she did not pretend to have an eye for art; indeed, to tell the truth, she pretended quite the reverse, and had to keep up her character.

"Now, Mr. Finial," said Miss Hardwick, "don't you go for to ruin my good brother; be merciful: if you come down very hard upon him, it will be strange if he does not drop a part of his loss upon the heads of his innocent sisters: don't overwhelm a couple of poor elderly females. To be sure it's all very pretty and picturesque, and all that. Don't look

severe; you know quite well those lancet lights of yours, though I could not for the world tell you what they are, would cost a fortune."

"And if they did," said Miss Clarissa, "some one will surely be raised up to us to share the expense: it would be yielding to the enemy of the church; it would be sacrificing our principles. Still, to be sure," added the excellent lady more calmly, "if it should be *very much* more expensive —— and indeed I think this very pretty, I must say,"

"Yes, to be sure; I told you all the ladies would like it, Manifold," said Mr. Finial with a quiet chuckle. The architect grew very red, and the rector fell once more into trouble: it was not very flattering to the ladies; but their good opinion seemed quite the reverse of a compliment. Minnie was by no means a partisan of "her sex;" she thought it proper, however, to stand up for them now.

"Everybody knows that a lady's opinion is always the standard in taste," said Minnie. "Oh! yes, Mr. Finial; you know it quite well: you dare not do anything in society but what pleases the ladies. You gentlemen boast, when you have a chance; but you can't be independent: you always have to yield in society."

"Society is not church building," said the connoisseur; but he was put down. After a little time the party got quite unanimous against him, and all that he could do was, what many a greater critic than he has done, to take refuge in the superiority of his own judgment, and withdraw, shrugging his shoulders, disgusted, yet full of compassion for the unfortunate people who did not know so well as he. The whole committee broke up immediately after; but as Hugh left the rectory door, he encountered Minnie with a great sister-of-charity grey cloak and a little basket on her arm. She was going to "see the poor people," and walked demurely by Mr. Hugh's side with a delightful little air of timidity, which Mr. Hugh did not comprehend. Then she began to ask about Miss Mitford.

"I liked her *so* much," said Minnie; "and I see she has quite taken everybody's heart at Heathcote: such a sweet simple girl!" Hugh blushed to his own great annoyance.

"Evelyn and she are great friends. Let me carry your basket for you," said Minnie's reluctant squire.

"I could not trust you; no, indeed! there's jelly and all rts of things in it," said Minnie. "But I think if I were ious, I should be sure to envy Miss Mitford; such a sweet

calm disposition: nothing will ever trouble her much: and then, like so many of those mild people, everybody loves her. I wonder why people are made so different! some *feel* everything, and always get misunderstood. Grumbling is odious, isn't it? but it's hard to live for years in a house that never comes to be a home."

As Minnie concluded with a deep sigh, Hugh's sympathy was roused. He said hurriedly, "You don't mean the rectory; you don't mean ——"

"Oh, dear! I don't mean anything," said Minnie; "only when one thinks one has made some *friends*, to make up for one's own private troubles, and after a little while, when one's heart is as warm as ever, finds one's friends grow quite cold and forgetful. There! I'm sure it's the maddest thing in the world to say this to you: men are so different,—always fickle, always changing. Heigho! I wish I could change too."

"If Evelyn has grieved you, Minnie," said Hugh in great perplexity, "I am sure she will be heartily sorry; and as for me ——"

"Ah! as for you! don't say a word; I could not bear it," cried the young intriguer, waving her hand and curtseying to him as she disappeared suddenly into a cottage. Hugh stood still in sheer amazement, gazing after her: was she crazy? or what in the world could she mean?

CHAPTER XVII.

Hugh went home in haste to complete his preparations. He was to leave for Oxford in a very few days; and though he felt himself half driven into going, he was too young not to look forward to it with a little excitement. But when he entered the hall at Heathcote, he found the whole youthful group clustered round a little heap of things upon a table. These turned out to be a dressing-case and several other necessities, which my lady had ordered for him from London, and which Edie and Harry were extremely curious about. Evelyn and Susan had just come in from a walk; they were standing together at a little distance, listening to the children, and Evelyn's face, at least, was serious enough; perhaps Susan's also. "Oh, Hugh! it looks so real to see that little packing-case with your name upon it," said Evelyn; "one can't forget now that you're going away."

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"I say, Hugh, the rich fellows have silver dressing-cases; yours ain't silver, is it?" demanded Harry. "I wanted mamma to have it opened, but she wouldn't; it's to be as it is till you go away. I say, ain't you glad? I only wish it was me."

"And, Hugh! Hugh! grandmamma has sent you something: I saw a little parcel taken into your room, and I'm *sure* it was grandmamma's writing," cried Edie. "Doesn't it look as if he was going to be married, Evie? Isn't it fine to get so many presents? I should like to be married for that: oh! Susan, shouldn't you?"

"Edie, be quiet!" said Evelyn, with dignity.

Susan only blushed and laughed; but Hugh took the suggestion very badly: he was piqued to think that Susan could laugh when he was going away; and, unconsciously, Minnie's description occurred to him,—"a sweet, calm disposition, which would not feel anything very much." Hugh thought he had quite a right to be offended. "Edie is honest," he said; "she is not old enough to say one thing and mean another. I suppose lots of young ladies get married, because it's great fun to get presents. Eh, Evelyn, is it true?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Susan, and as she spoke, she turned hastily and ran upstairs, leaving her companions. Hugh did not feel he had made a success by his sarcasm; on the contrary, he was excessively exasperated, and longed to cudgel himself for his folly. What right had he to think she would care for his going away? and now what an abominable cub he must appear to her! Hugh's discomfort did not want the aggravation of Evelyn's immediate injudicious little poke at him.

"How *can* you be so rude, Hugh? I am sure if one did not care for you, one could almost be glad you were going away."

"Oh, indeed! I suppose Miss Mitford is," cried the offender angrily.

Evelyn glanced upstairs to make sure that her friend was out of hearing—then she took Hugh by the arm and led him to the window. "If you would only not be so dreadfully unreasonable," remonstrated Evelyn, "I do think Susan would be sorry. When we came in and saw the things, I—I very nearly cried, and so did she; but whenever people begin to love you, you come and aggravate them: if you were only good, I know Susan would be very, very sorry that you are going away."

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"Begin to love me!" the young man looked, startled, into his sister's face, with a violent blush. Evelyn, who in her innocence had no such meaning, started too, as she caught his eye, blushed as much as he did, and fell back away from him, casting a glance of terror up the stairs. Hugh could not say another word: he went off to his own room incontinently, his face burning, his heart beating; he did not quite understand, for the moment, the confusion of emotions into which this inadvertent word cast him. On his table was a rose, which Susan had given him last night, and which, with a little sentiment, he had put in water. He seized it now in his ardent boyish hands, kissed it as something precious, yet crushed it unawares as he hurried on in thought. "Begin to love him!" At these words the youth began to realize that he was a man, ready to plunge for himself into the world of maturer life. In a moment, like a revelation, all that depended upon that love burst upon him: not a boy's passion, concerned only with its special object, but a man's life, which must take form and shape, and settle into the established thing it should be, when the vows of youth came to their natural conclusion. He thought upon it all with glowing eyes and cheeks that burned; for loving and being married is not a frolic to a man. The thought came upon Hugh with a strange thrill of self-consciousness, a sudden sense of independent life. It seemed to remove that glow of brilliant uncertainty which hangs about the steps of youth, and establish in its place, in a moment, a steadier, stronger, fuller light. It dazzled the young man's eyes as he sat thinking, dreaming; then he saw the poor rose fallen to pieces in his eager fingers, and gathered it up, with care and self-reproach, laying the scattered leaves tenderly together. What if all his dream should fall to pieces like the flower! What if Evelyn's innocent words should mean nothing more than what they were intended to mean, "beginning to love!" No, it was not possible to consider them calmly; they went tingling and thrilling through the young man's heart, calling up all kinds of pictures. He was not in that condition himself: it appeared by this time that poor Hugh had done a great deal more than begin. Susan, though she knew nothing of the turmoil she had raised in this youth's thoughts, scarcely appeared all day, and pouted a little when she did appear. He had no opportunity of watching her, of finding out whether Evelyn had spoken the truth, even had he been cool enough to do it, which Hugh was not. But in the

evening, after dinner, Susan's little cloud of offence lightened; she was content to make one of the circle round the fire with Evelyn, Edith, and Harry, around which circle Hugh lingered, while my lady sat working at a little distance, and Miss Latimer read the papers. Aunt Margaret sometimes read a paragraph aloud; my lady sometimes made a remark; but the bulk of the conversation was carried on by the young people round the fire. "Oh! Hugh, tell us: what has grandmamma sent you?" asked the inquisitive Edie. And Hugh blushed, for his thoughts had been full of things so different that he had never even noticed the packet from grandmamma. "I never saw it, Edie," he confessed; "I was thinking of something else: you may go and look if you please." Edie started up, well pleased with her commission, and ran off, attended by Harry. The circle at the fire was so much less, and somehow seemed to become a great deal more confidential, since very likely Evelyn guessed the something else which her brother had been thinking of; and both of them blushed a little when they looked at Susan. Susan somehow looked half-embarrassed too, and recklessly adventured to begin the talk with a bold reminder.

"Mr. Hugh does not judge other people by himself, Evelyn," said Susan; "he says young ladies get married because it's fun to get presents: I wonder how *he* can tell, when he cares so little for his own."

"What was that you said, Susan, about young ladies getting married?" asked Aunt Margaret rather severely, suspecting some one of poaching on her special domain.

Very demurely, but with rather a mischievous glance at the culprit, Susan repeated Hugh's unfortunate speech. "It is perfectly true," said Miss Latimer, "and a very sad thing to think of: I do believe half the girls in the country marry because it's great fun; and for that reason I always condemn the great displays common at weddings, and the ridiculous system of giving presents. It is temptation enough to a young fancy, all the romance that has been industriously thrown around the name of bride; and I feel quite sure, if there were no orange-blossoms, nor *trousseaux*, nor wedding gifts, nor romantic interest, but everything was done in a plain matter-of-fact way, most young women would take more time to consider what they were about. Don't you agree with me, Eleanor?"

My lady shook her head. "I am afraid I like to see a

pretty wedding as well as Edie," said the mother of the house, though she sighed after she had smiled; but my lady was far too natural a woman to blot out the everyday face of the sun with her own unusual grief.

"And mamma always sends something pretty to every bride she knows," cried Evelyn—though Evelyn's own ideas of brides were exceedingly ethereal, and she might easily have been tempted to disdain the something pretty in her own person; but she was eager to take the same side as mamma.

"Ah! my dear child, don't *you* marry because it's great fun," said Miss Latimer; "I assure you there is not such another serious business in life, nor one that a woman should think so much before embarking on; and I think Hugh quite right. Really I must say I was not prepared for anything so judicious from a young man of his years."

Susan looked up in merry triumph, victorious over Hugh; but as she caught his eye, oddly enough, the young lady faltered, blushed, looked down, did not know what to make of it. Mr. Hugh's eyes said something most distinctly: though she did not understand it, it confused Susan; instead of laughing over his downfal, she became quite quiet, suddenly felt "very strange," somehow fancied tears were in her eyes, and drew back into her corner in a panic, terrified lest any one should observe her. My lady, too, had looked at her boy, and had perceived some change of his countenance. For an instant, struck with terror, she laid down her work and listened intently. Had he heard anything? But her prevailing apprehension was calmed as he spoke.

"Don't think me judicious, please: I said it, but I did not mean it, for I don't believe anything of the kind," said Hugh. "One does not talk about the things one feels most—and I do not believe a woman can think less gravely of what seems to *me* the weightiest beginning of a man's life."

"Ah! it is a very much more serious matter for a woman," said Miss Latimer, with a glance of pathetic meaning at my lady.

None of the others spoke; for Hugh, who had not said anything like what he meant to say, and who intended to convey, with all the eloquence of a secret meaning, his own tender enthusiasm and novel flush of lover's thoughts, was silent for shame of himself having failed; and his mother and sister and Susan were all equally inquiring within themselves, what he meant, and what new thing this was that took such form in

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Hugh's fancies. Just at this moment, for the relief of the whole party, Edie and Harry entered breathless, carrying the parcel from grandmamma. Harry threw it down at Hugh's feet with great disdain, "I daresay you all thought it was something fine," said Harry: "it's only a lot of old books: I would not have them if I were you. I say, grandmamma's a humbug! Give them to old Hardwick; he thinks a great deal of all that stuff."

"Harry!" cried my lady in severe reproof; upon which the young sinner apologized for calling grandmamma a humbug; but added, under his breath,

"It's true, though—or she'd never have sent such rubbish to Hugh."

The rubbish, however, turned out to be some very valuable and rare old books, not at all unworthy the young man's acceptance, accompanied by a grandmotherly note, warning him not to make himself disagreeable, and hoping to hear good accounts of him from Oxford. The party separated early that night, each of them having something to think about; but, after my lady had reached her dressing-room, some one knocked gently at the door. With surprise, and not without her usual pang of terror, she opened it. It was Hugh, very red and embarrassed, who came in without saying a word, walked up to the fire, the usual resort of English gentlemen in trouble, returned from it, took his mother's hand, and kissing it, stood by her, growing more and more crimson: at last his secret burst forth. "Mother! if I ask Susan Mitford to be my wife, shall you be pleased?" My lady was startled, but she was not unprepared. She answered with a motherly overflow of love and sympathy, "My dear boy! I love her half as well as yourself or Evelyn," and took the young lover into her tender embrace, almost as if Evelyn's self had come with a similar tale. He was so young; he had been her boy till now. Then my lady went on asking questions. "This was what you meant? and how long have you thought of it, Hugh?" Hugh was ashamed to confess, only to-day; though Susan herself had been in his thoughts very much longer.

"Only to-day! think of it to-morrow also: to-day is sudden," said my lady. "You are both very young; but God bless my boy and my boy's choice! You could not have made one that would have given more pleasure—God bless you both." The conjunction pleased Hugh.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next day was rather a troubled day with the family at Heathcote. Sir Philip Umphraville represented one of the adjacent boroughs in Parliament; and in the local papers appeared an address from his constituents, demanding to know why he had neglected their interests by so long an absence, and calling upon him to resign his seat. This of itself was enough to excite the household; it drove even his own concerns, intimate and engrossing as they were, from the mind of Hugh, and filled my lady with many and contradictory emotions. It seemed almost intended as a punishment, a piece of revenge. Who had prompted it? And the chance that it might bring her husband home once more, overwhelmed her mind with a sickening dread. She thought of this, and at the same time she thought of a probable discussion in some local paper of the whole matter, which discussion, indeed, began now in an ambiguous leading article, touching Sir Philip's absence, which "perhaps might be from ill-health, perhaps from economical motives, perhaps for pleasure," the country editor said in exquisite irony. And my lady groaned in spirit when she thought of her own name, the name of her children, once more dragged through this diluted mire at the pleasure of all the petty politicians of Hustings: her own injuries, perhaps, the meeting ground for her husband's opponents,—his breach of the domestic virtues, the principal offence against him. In the case of another, very likely my lady would have thought it very right and a most proper retribution; but she writhed under it as a new insult when the case was her own. Her mind was almost weakened by her terrors; she watched Hugh when he took up the paper with jealous eyes: she knew by the angry fire flushing up to his brow, the moment at which the young man caught sight of it: but when he threw it down and was about to leave the room in haste, my lady caught his hand and arrested him. They were alone in the room, save for Miss Latimer, who sat writing at a distance and could not hear. "Hugh!" cried my lady, with tears in her eyes, "my dear, dear boy! you think of taking new responsibilities on yourself. Oh! pause, think; you may one day have a son: do nothing against your natural duty to your father!"

"Mother!" cried Hugh, starting as if he had received a blow, "what have I done to make you speak so?"

My lady folded her hands painfully together. "I am afraid

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—I am afraid!" she said. Her cheeks were red with two great painful spots of anxiety and trouble: she did not look like my lady. Her son was startled by her appearance: he thought within himself, in his ignorance, that his mother's old love was coming back, that her heart yearned for her husband: it grieved him and filled him with an impatient pity. Was there no one in the world to be trusted! but, at least, he must not add to her burdens.

"I hope never to do anything that will grieve *you*, mother," he said rather sadly, and, finding she said no more, went away. My lady did not understand him either: she feared no misinterpretation of her own motives, and she supposed the youth was bowing his spirit in reluctant and bitter submission to her; but she trusted, with perhaps an over confidence, in what he said. She thought to herself, as many a mother has thought, that her son, who loved her so dearly, would never break her heart; and she, too, went away to pray for God's blessing on him, and for strength to herself to bear all that might be coming, which did not seem as if it would be an easy load.

Meanwhile, Susan kept close by Evelyn, anxiously avoiding any chance of being alone. Perhaps she was afraid of something that might be said to her; perhaps only of her own thoughts. She did not know; but clung to her gentle companion, as if that tender young soul could have given her any protection. Then Aunt Margaret seemed more seriously admonitory than usual: she wrote a great deal, and looked very much as though she were brewing a special and extremely solemn lecture for the advantage of her young charge. So what between Hugh—who went out and in, in ceaseless motion, and kept bringing flowers, books, everything he could think of, to the little table where she sat with Evelyn, but who was manifestly perturbed and scarcely spoke the whole morning—and Aunt Margaret, who evidently meditated something serious—and her own thoughts, which ran on at a very rapid pace, and cost her a great deal of trouble, poor Susan was very glad to hold by Evelyn, to talk in whispers, and try to laugh at a very small matter, so that Miss Latimer, who supposed herself a very good judge in such affairs, began to be much more easy in her mind, thinking no harm could have befallen, since her young friend seemed rather more thoughtless and silly than usual to-day. So the world went on till the evening, when the two girls together had gone into the little conservatory, which opened from a little ante-room, which, in its turn, communi-

gated with the drawing-room. It was twilight, and the elders of the party had not come downstairs yet; and Susan, feeling safer in the half-light and among the colourless plants, which were scarcely visible, did not perceive that Evelyn had left her, and that she was entirely unprotected, till the sound of a different step close by made her start. Yes, there was no help for it; it was Hugh. He seemed to make quite sure, too, that they were alone, and that no unnecessary Evelyn was within call. He began immediately in a rather pathetic voice,—"Susan, perhaps to-morrow I may have to go away." Now Susan's thoughts had been rather highly strained to-day; she had been startled to find herself at last in the young lover's power for the moment: but when she heard this, which was not exactly what she expected, Susan—forgive her, all ye ladies of romance who are prepared for emergencies!—Susan answered by a nervous, unsteady little laugh. She thought herself a monster, but she could not help it: Hugh had come with a purpose, and his voice was rather artificial for a beginning. The pathos was so evident, that honest Susan, though her heart beat loud, could not help herself. She laughed, and Hugh was silent, ashamed, half angry, half conscious of the truth. How many minutes were wasted consequently, it would have needed Aunt Margaret, watch in hand, behind a curtain, to reckon. But Susan did not get off for her sauciness; on the contrary, it came down upon her at last in real earnest, real downright young love, master of all the pathos and all the powers in nature. She had not a cover for her head under the storm of the fiery straightforward young eloquence, which there was no possibility of avoiding; and the upshot was, that the young people were walking about the dark conservatory, forgetting everything in the world but themselves and the strange, new, wonderful life which had come down upon them in a moment, while everybody hunted all over the house for Mr. Hugh and Miss Susan, and dinner waited on the table. Dinner! when one had just come to and stood upon such a mount of vision, the young apotheosis of tender imaginations. And lo! here come Harry and Edie with echoing feet into the charmed darkness: and the dazzled eyes which cannot meet the light, and cheeks a-glow with shamefaced, conscious happiness, have to be dragged out into the illuminated rooms,—they who blush to meet each other's eyes, to have everybody gaze full at them, servants and children. Yet strange enough, in spite of all this annoyance, youthful sympathizer, be it

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known to you that Hugh and Susan could not help feeling rather happy. They did no great justice to the dinner, and did by no means lead the conversation; but, in spite of Harry's laughter and everybody's observation, perhaps no two people in all England were less to be pitied.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning, when she rose from the breakfast-table, anticipating much more agreeable things, Susan was suddenly arrested by Miss Latimer. "I should like to speak with you in my dressing-room, please," said Aunt Margaret; "my dear child, unless you have something else very important to occupy you, come with me now." Susan cast a glance of dismay upon Hugh, whose claim upon her was certainly very important; she thought it very hard to spend the morning in Miss Latimer's dressing-room, when he was going away so soon, poor fellow! But Susan was reasonable, and obeyed her temporary guardian. Miss Latimer led the way out of the room; and when they were without the door, took Susan's hand and said, "Poor child!" with the most tender compassion. Susan was not so easily alarmed as most young ladies, but this startled her a little.

"Is grandmamma ill?" she cried anxiously.

Miss Latimer regarded her with a look of unutterable pity. "No, my poor, dear child! it is yourself who are in danger," said Aunt Margaret; and Susan was so secure of herself, that she went on thereafter with quite a light heart. But not so her protecting angel, who looked extremely serious. When they came to the dressing-room, which was a very snug one, Miss Latimer took possession of an arm-chair which stood by her writing-desk, and pointed out another one, which seemed to have been set ready for her, to Susan. It was a low chair, and was drawn close to Miss Latimer's seat of authority: it seemed to represent the disciple at her teacher's feet. Now all this state impressed Susan with an effect quite the reverse of solemn. She was so straightforward by nature, that everything which was done for effect had a bad chance with Susan: she could not help smiling when she took the disciple's chair. To this Miss Latimer paid no attention, as she was then busy arranging herself in her place and putting a few papers on

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her desk in order. When this was done, she turned with a grave face to "her dear young friend."

"My dear Susan," said Aunt Margaret, "I don't think you know very much of the history of our family. Unfortunately, young people in this age seldom do, or they might be preserved from many mischances; yet a foolish tenderness has restrained even myself from speaking of it,—restrained me so long, I fear, that you will not escape without a heartache, my poor child!"

"What is it, Aunt Margaret?" said Susan; but the girl was by no means sufficiently solemnized; indeed, appeared on the whole rather irreverent, and evidently set down as hyperbole half that her admonitress had said.

"I would fain warn you; I would fain see you in a more becoming state of mind before I speak," said Miss Latimer. "Child! child! how are you to bear it, while you look up at me with such an unconcerned face?"

"Aunt Margaret, people are of different tempers," said Susan, roused a little; "I shall bear it best for hearing at once what it is."

Aunt Margaret sighed and shook her head. "You shall hear," she answered solemnly: "it is a thing which has caused pain, misery, and unspeakable grief to generation after generation of our race; it has kept me an unmarried woman, solitary and single; and, if your principles are what I expect to find them, it will keep you also, Susan, from so much as a thought of betrothal or marriage. You are fatally debarred from such engagements; your duty to your race forbids you to consult your own happiness: the only life possible to you, in consistence with honour and virtue, is a life like mine." Susan's cheek had blanched a little; but she was not overpowered: she said "Why?" firmly and with unfaltering lips. "I have some notes to read you, which I made yesterday on purpose," said Miss Latimer, "perceiving, my poor dear child, that you were in danger. Listen to the headings, Susan:—Richard Latimer, son of John Latimer and Mary Mitford, born 1740, became insane in the year 60 of the same century; died in that condition ten years after. Margaret Mitford, his cousin-german, went mad in 1745, supposed with fright; died melancholy in 1787. Susan, her daughter, a somnambulist and monomaniac. John Mitford, 1760, eccentric; one idiot in his family of seven children; one of his sons crazy in after life, said to be from a sunstroke in India; I daresay you

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remember him, your father's cousin Richard. Need I go on? Your own father, a very clever man, was subject to delusions. Your whole race is tainted to the heart with this terrible hereditary affliction. Susan! I know what you feel; I understand the struggle; but I appeal to all the higher principles of your nature. Will you transmit this curse through innocent unborn generations,—to your children?"

Susan, much startled and looking pale, had risen from her chair unconsciously. "I never heard this before!" she cried with a tremble in her voice: her head ached to hear it, though still she did not quite know what it was.

"Sit down, my love; do not exhaust yourself, you have occasion for all your strength," said Miss Latimer, with compassion. "I have been too long in seeing your danger, my poor Susan; still I trust no great harm is done: and, my dear young fellow-sufferer, you and I will go away; we will comfort each other; we will find solace in friendship and duty and good works, knowing love to be denied us. My Susan, is it not so?"

Susan scarcely heard the words addressed to her; she made a long pause. "I don't know," she said, rather hoarsely; "I don't see it: the only thing is to tell Hugh."

"To tell Hugh?"

"Yes, before another day passes, another hour! he is going away, poor fellow! he must be told," cried Susan, rising again. "May I go now, Aunt Margaret? I don't see it yet myself, but I must tell Hugh."

"My dearest child," said Aunt Margaret, taking the girl's hand into her own, and gazing with her fixed grey eyes into Susan's face, "am I too late? has it come to this? Poor, poor darling! must you tell Hugh? Oh! Susan, I shall never forgive myself; I thought nothing had come of it; I thought what I said would be in time. Dear love! I see you don't hesitate,—you perceive your duty; but, oh! had I but spoken sooner, what it might have saved you, my poor child!" Susan drew her hands away: she was very grave, self-possessed, calm, like one who has something to do, and is bent upon doing it. She was not overpowered with any particular emotion; she showed nothing of the passion of self-sacrifice. Perhaps Miss Latimer was rather doubtful of such appearances in a girl in love: she followed Susan, who had made a few steps towards the door, and laid her hand upon the girl's arm.

"You don't realize it, my child," she said; "do you know

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that you are going to have the severest test put upon your resolution, to subject yourself to entreaties, remonstrances, arguments of all kinds? It is hard to make a stand, even with all the supports you can have; but, my child! my precious child! I cannot expose you to this trial. Let *me* see him; it is beyond your strength. My dear Susan! you do not know what it is that you undertake,—to give him up for ever, and tell him so. No! you must not thus try your strength: let me do it, my dear child."

"You?" said Susan. "No, I am not giving up any one: I have to tell Hugh; it is in his hands. You need not fear: I will ask my lady to be with me; but it is for Hugh to judge, not for me."

"Susan! do I understand you? After all I have said, is it possible?" cried Aunt Margaret; "can you hesitate as to what is your duty? I am amazed, shocked! What do you say? are you content to choose your own selfish happiness, at the risk of bringing a curse upon unborn children? You don't think of it, Susan; you don't perceive it. Had your father done his duty, and refrained from marrying, this hour of misery could not have fallen upon you; and will you entail it over and over again upon daughters of your own?"

A vivid blush crossed Susan's face; this address seemed to rouse her at last. "After all, Aunt Margaret," she said, steadily, yet with a passing smile, which did not lessen her gravity, "I prefer that my father should have married, in spite of this hour and all that may come of it,—I am glad to be living; but I do not see my duty so well as you do: I see nothing clear now but that I must tell Hugh; may I go?"

Miss Latimer had to make room for her, in spite of herself; she could make no way against Susan's serious immediate purpose and the clear eye of her good sense. She was puzzled; she did not remember an instance of such an experiment meeting with so little success; and, though she had studied the character of her young charge, felt herself bound to confess that, for the present moment, she did not understand Susan. Had she suggested the same thing to Evelyn, that tender heart would have rushed on the instant into the precious alternative of self-sacrifice. There is no such charm or temptation for a generous young spirit. It had even touched Susan with a momentary impulse; but nature had made Susan wise: she knew, without knowing how she knew it, that there are self-sacrifices which make more misery than

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selfishness can do; and that, whatever right she might have over her own happiness, she had none to injure the happiness of others. She was not led away by the first idea of making herself an immediate martyr to the supposed welfare of those she loved. She went away with a firm step, but a throbbing heart; her head ached, too, not with physical pain, but with an overpress of thoughts; neither did she go to Hugh immediately, but turned into her own room for a moment, to think it over; and this was what Susan thought: "Some families make a rule against it; I have read so," said Susan to herself: "they will not have any one among them whose race has had any taint. If it should be so among the Umphravilles, I should be saved the pain of thinking, and then everybody—would—be satisfied: I had better not think till I know. And it might not be true, perhaps; but she would never make such a tale: it must be true; and I—I—well I did not know. Oh! Hugh, it is not my fault! but if *he* does not mind, I wonder what I must do." Susan paused,—what was she to do? Then again she thought to herself: "I remember poor old cousin Dick; but then what had he to do with me? And my father,—was he crazy? but even if he was, I do not believe *I* shall ever be mad; I am different," said Susan, aloud, unconsciously clasping her hands together. And she was right: she rose up strengthened by the conviction, and went away into the shadow of the curtains for a minute or two: it was to ask the guidance of the Only wise, the Only just.

"And, however it happens, if I only do what is right," said Susan softly to herself, laying her fingers upon her eyes to keep in two tears, "I—I—shall be sure to be satisfied." It was with this conclusion, and with a serious steady step, a little heavier than its wont, that Susan at last went downstairs.

CHAPTER XX.

My lady was in the library with her son. They were talking over his betrothal, which his mother had been informed of last night, though Hugh was a little restless and impatient, longing to escape and look for Susan. It was just the conjunction which Susan wished: she came in, rather paler than usual, and stood by the table, keeping near my lady. Hugh sprang

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up to bring her a chair; but Susan would not sit down; she would not even permit him to remain by her, but sent him away to his former place, somewhat to the youth's annoyance. Then she remained standing, with her grave face, before the mother and the son. "I have just heard something from Aunt Margaret," said Susan; "I came to tell you."

"Aunt Margaret!" cried Hugh, starting up again; "the most tiresome, interfering——"

"Hush!" said my lady: "and, Susan, my dear, sit down and tell us. She is full of fancies; but you are too sensible to give too much weight to what she says."

"It is not what *I* think of it that matters," said Susan, still standing; "I came to tell Hugh; and, dear Lady Umphraville, do not go away: I cannot do it unless you are here. Hugh, she says that—that—what you spoke of last night should never be; that I would bring a curse into the family; that it would be best to give it up at once."

"Give it up!" cried Hugh.

Nothing could keep him now from Susan's side, where he stood, holding her fast, with a grim smile of derision; while my lady took her disengaged hand, and said, "A blessing, my dear child; she meant a blessing."

Poor Susan, for the first time, was rather overcome; the tears, which she had pressed in before, came out with a gush: it was her duty to stand firm by herself and tell him, and yet it was wonderful what a yearning impulse of weakness she had to lean upon the strong young arm which was round her, and own to him that, in her heart, she could never give it up, nor could change, even though they were parted for ever; but she tried, virtuously, poor child! to free herself; and, leaning upon my lady's kind hand instead, summoned all her fortitude for the statement which might—it was possible—alienate from her both mother and son. Susan had not been frightened for it herself when she heard of it; but somehow she became frightened now, as she thought what a terrible sound the word had, and what effects it might produce. She turned round and looked full into Hugh's face. "She says there is insanity in my family," cried Susan in a voice which trembled with fear.

Her young lover, who had been gazing at her with serious anxiety and apprehension, grew suddenly red with the impatience of his natural temper. "Susan, you mean to laugh at me!" he cried, pressing her hand with an angry fondness,

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which hurt poor Susan's fingers; "is this why you have frightened us? Susan, it is not like *you!*"

The first word of displeasure which had been addressed to her in that house; yet it was strange how it comforted and reassured Susan: she looked up quite steadily and gravely, with no more tremor. "There is insanity in my family," she repeated; "I never heard of it before, but I cannot doubt it is true; and she says it must never be; that I am wrong to form any engagements; that I must live like herself all my life; that it would be injustice to you."

"And what did you answer?" asked my lady.

Susan glanced up again with a little renewed timidity; "I said I would tell Hugh."

"And I say I will answer *her*," cried Hugh. "Mother, keep Susan safe; we must have no more of this."

My lady put her hand on his arm, detaining him. She made the two young people sit down by her, and addressed Hugh in the first instance. "Margaret Latimer is our guest," said my lady; I forbid you to say a word to her, and so, I am sure, does Susan; and now, my dear, let us hear. I know your family; I do not remember any ground she has——what did she say?" Susan went over again, as well as she remembered, the instances with which Miss Latimer had been so well prepared. It was not very easy to restrain Hugh's indignation, but my lady was a little disturbed by the catalogue. She went over it again, trying to recollect with rather an uneasy air.

"A sunstroke in India is a very feasible reason," said my lady, "so was a fright in the rebellion year. Your father was a very clever man, Susan; and your mother—certainly, if the main stock of the family has been touched by such an affliction, they have had the good sense to counteract it by marrying sensible wives. Your mother—you are very like her, my dear; you are not at all like the Mitfords—had more sense and judgment than any girl I ever knew."

But in this there was a tone of self-argument, which brought the blood to Susan's cheek. My lady was certainly disturbed and ill at ease: she had a certain pride in, as well as gratitude for, the entire health and perfect constitutional vigour of her children. At the first idea, her prevailing foible was touched; she did not like to think of descendants of hers bearing the possible taint of such a disease. She tried to persuade herself it was nonsense, a foolish exaggeration of Miss Latimer's; but still it made her uneasy, and Susan perceived it. The girl

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rose with a proud sudden impulse, and turned to Hugh. "Let me say good-bye," she cried with a haste which was not like Susan; we don't see it, we are too young, but your mother does. Oh! Hugh, let us part at once while we can; I will never bring a curse to *you!*"

At which word Hugh rose up along with her, and stood by her side, holding her fast. "I could be angry," cried the young man, "but I will not, Susan, for your sake; only let there be no more of this; not another word! I will not hear it. You have no right whatever to dispose of yourself; you are mine, and belong to me. Susan! if you make me angry, you will be shocked; and I shall be angry if I hear this again. I am much more likely to get crazed than you are; and if you fail me—do you hear, Susan?—if you fail me, and my mother has a hand in it, I swear I will never trust man nor woman, word nor vow, again!"

At this remonstrance Susan held her peace, half in fear. My lady took it up with some eagerness: "If I inquired, it was but to see what truth might be in the tale, Hugh," she said; "not to insinuate for an instant that your engagement depended on it—by no means; but Susan sees that it is a serious matter; and it would be much more satisfactory to us all, if we could find out that it was greatly exaggerated, or indeed untrue." Her tone was doubtful and perplexed; it did not please her son.

"Mother," he said, "you will see it presently, but you do not now: forgive me; I am not undutiful; but Susan is mine, and I must take care of her; whether it is true or not true, matters nothing. I might be tempted to wish it true, almost, because it would make me more needful to her; but I cannot wish either grief or trouble to Susan; I cannot even have it discussed before her. No, mother! speak of it to Miss Latimer, if you will; but Susan and I have nothing to do with it. We are young, we are strong, we trust in God, and whatever He sends, we will encounter together." The young man turned away in the high tide and flow of youthful feeling, excited, elevated to that enthusiastic pitch at which people unconsciously use the language of piety. My lady gazed at him in astonishment; perhaps it was a pang of maternal envy—that tender enviousness of love which has nothing ungenerous in it—which brought the tears to her eyes. Here was one thing, then, in which Hugh would defy even his mother,—another affection, more precious still and dearer than her own. My

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lady bore the consciousness with great fortitude; but that is all that can be said: she felt it as mothers will feel such sudden revelations of nature. Perhaps if Hugh had been an only child, his mother might have broken her heart over it; as it was, she watched him lead the unwilling Susan away, with a little pang at her heart. It cost her some exertion to regain her composure. She thought of her own youth; but here she stood at sad disadvantage in comparison with the uninjured wives of common life. *Her* betrothal, her marriage, all the jubilee of her beginning, was a mockery, looking back at it *now;* so she had to say to herself—cold comfort—"It is nature," before she came, gradually and slowly and with pain, to acknowledge to herself that it was a blessed, good, happy necessity, leading out of other people's worn ways and failures, into a new way of its own, clouded by no past, the fervent young heart at the beginning of its life. And with this thought my lady's heart did so expand at last, that she thanked God freely and with sincerity for having drawn her son out of the family cloud, and led him into pleasant paths of his own. Led to this motherly act of self-renunciation, she began to ponder again, still with uneasiness, upon what she had heard. It required a scientific mind like Aunt Margaret's to draw together all the unfortunates of a family in a hundred and fifty years, and work them into an hereditary calamity. The common understanding noted the instances, but did not draw the conclusion; but the facts and the theory together staggered my lady. She kept thinking, puzzling over it, trying to remember other Mitfords of whom there were plenty, and inquiring with herself about other families, whether such misfortunes were so very unusual as to justify Miss Latimer; and, in fact, she continued extremely perplexed and uneasy, not knowing what to make of it, till the door opened with some noise, and Miss Latimer herself, rather heated and not in her best temper, entered the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Your son is extremely rude, Eleanor!" exclaimed Aunt Margaret; "and that infatuated girl!"

The virtue of opposition is marvellous. Quick as a passing shadow, at these words, the cloud of uneasiness and perplexity

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rolled from my lady's brow. "What has Hugh done now?" she said with a smile.

"Done *now?* You continually mistake me, Eleanor," cried the injured philosopher. "Have I ever complained before? though you cannot suppose I have shut my eyes to Hugh's boyish petulance. This, however, is very different; great principles are at stake. Eleanor, I call upon you for your interference: I cannot suppose you will permit such a wrong to be perpetrated upon your descendants."

"Speak plainly," said my lady; and so strange are the variations of human temper, that Lady Umphraville, who had been troubled about this self-same subject a few minutes ago, had to make an effort now not to be angry, when it became the subject of so touching an appeal.

Miss Latimer was nothing loth. "This morning," she said, "I thought it my duty to have a serious conversation with Susan: I thought it quite necessary, after what I observed last night. I told her of the unfortunate circumstances of her family,—the crazy Mitfords. Eleanor, I am the more surprised that you should have taken so little notice of this, because these circumstances must have been perfectly well known to you."

"The crazy Mitfords!" said my Lady; "I certainly never before heard that distinction."

"It is universally known," said Miss Latimer with a little heat; "you don't doubt my word, I trust; and you have been long out of Northumberland. But the crazy Mitfords they are, by common consent. Eleanor, have you never asked yourself why I remained unmarried?"

My lady suppressed a smile, and was half ashamed of herself for feeling amused. "I know very well it is your own choice," she said kindly, "and I believe I contented myself with knowing that; perhaps, because you prefer your freedom, Margaret; perhaps, because you have not met the proper person. Don't be offended, pray; I merely answer your question."

"Ah, Eleanor! it is thus the world judges," said Miss Latimer, with a deep sigh; "I could have wished *you* to see further below the surface. I have remained what I am from choice, indeed; but that choice was the stern dictate of duty: circumstances made me take the whole question into consideration many years ago. I, too, though few ever knew of it, have loved and suffered; and, as I decided then, I had hoped to see

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Susan decide now: I determined, Eleanor, that no daughter of mine should ever live to blame me; that this taint, so hideous and frightful, should not descend further by my means. I sacrificed myself without hesitation, though not without a struggle, to the interests of my race; and can you wonder that my heart bleeds to think of Susan, who will not see a similar, a still more imperative duty?—for the hereditary curse lies more heavily on her family than on mine."

"I am very much amazed," said my lady; "your relationship with the Mitfords is not very close; why should their affliction, if they are afflicted, affect you?"

"It does," said Miss Latimer, gloomily; "I have very strong opinions on the subject. To my mind, the least trace of this curse is enough to fortify a conscientious mind against transmitting it; but Susan—Susan is in ten times greater danger than ever I was; yet when I stopped them just now—Hugh and she together—to ask them, I confess with indignation, whether they could with open eyes, go on to blight the existence of their children, your son turned round upon me with—I can make excuses for his youth—the rage of a boy's passion; and Susan turned away and had not a word to answer. I am grieved, I am disappointed; I had not looked for such selfishness—and, Eleanor, I appeal to you."

"You spoke to them together, of their children! these two young creatures!" cried my lady, rising up with burning cheeks; "how dared you? It is beyond human forbearance: I could not have suspected anything like this, even of you!"

"I confess," said Miss Latimer, "that I cannot stand upon what young ladies call propriety, when I feel that great principles are at stake. Why should they not think of their children? How much better would this world be, if such considerations were more frequent! Would you have them fix their future lives by the delusion of romance?"

"I would leave the dew on their youth!" cried my lady, indignantly. "When we were young, what would anybody have thought of a young girl of seventeen who made calculations about her children? Shocking! unwomanly! I blush to think of it, who have been a mother for twenty years."

"When we were young, these things were far too little thought of," retorted Miss Latimer; "girls and boys married each other, because they thought they were in love, without a single serious consideration. Who thought of the welfare of the race, or of the result to posterity, in all the marriages that

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used to be made? But was that a virtue? No! Eleanor; and you, who are a mother, ought to impress upon your children the importance of looking at everything, of taking all circumstances into consideration, and of thinking, not of themselves alone, but of a future generation, who may inherit from them vigour or weakness, health or disease. To me it is one of the greatest questions in life."

"Were people long ago less vigorous than they are now?" said my lady; "but I cannot blame my Hugh for his indignation. Listen to me: romance is nature, Margaret; your calculations are abhorrent to nature; I cannot think them anything but disgusting. One day, doubtless, my son will love his wife all the dearer," continued my lady, the colour rising in her matron cheek, and an unconscious pathos touching her voice, "because she is the mother of his children; but now they are to each other the only charmed things in the world: their future is only a dream; the present, when they are together, is enough for them. They are more reverent of each other now than human creatures are at any other time; and you go to them, speaking about their children, putting suggestions into their minds which cover them with confusion, tempting them to think grossly even of themselves, if it were possible to tempt them; and you wonder that an ardent young man like Hugh, who is full of natural modesty and veneration, should turn upon you! Nay, it is useless to speak; your view is not a high view, but a mean one: I blush to think of it!" And my lady blushed over her pure forehead, where shame sat angrier than on a girl's, and walked about the room in much agitation, shocked in all her womanly delicacies and motherly reticence; but Aunt Margaret, who had a great deal more experience than my lady, who had gone dispassionately into the whole subject, and knew the influences which affect population, and could shuffle about the instruments of her game—the young men and maidens who represent the future—as calmly as if they were made of wood,—Aunt Margaret, with the most obliging forbearance, was not angry: she only sighed the sigh of conscious superiority over her prejudiced and unenlightened friend.

"We will not discuss the subject since we feel so differently," said Miss Latimer. "My mode of action is regulated by principles too high to give way to feeling; I might resent what you have said, if I were not so sorry for you, Eleanor; but of course what people think, makes no difference to me, so long

as I know I am doing my duty. I cannot give up my young charge without trying once more to recall her to a sense of her responsibilities: I mean to wait here for her, please; and if you will remain while I make a last appeal to Susan, I shall be obliged to you. Unfortunately, it seldom happens that young people in her circumstances know who are their best friends."

"Cousin Margaret," said my lady, in amazement, "have you forgotten that *you* too were once young?"

"I am only forty-five now," said Miss Latimer, with a momentary gleam of nature: "it is not so *very* long ago. Oh, yes! I remember it; but I fear the recollection will not make me more indifferent about Susan."

"What you have done yourself, you would fain see another do," said my lady, with cruel sarcasm.

Miss Latimer shook her head, sighed, gazed pathetically into her injurer's face, and forgave her with sad benignity; then she took a book and seated herself comfortably to wait for Susan. My lady was a good deal disturbed—perplexed between anger, disapproval, compassion, the claims of ancient friendship and present hospitality—and a little fluttered by her own agitation of temper; for my lady unfortunately was not fortified against the natural emotions, like her companion, but answered to them one by one as they breathed across her,—resentment, indignation, compunction, perplexity,—and began to look over the papers on her desk forthwith, with a mind more quickly alive to the sounds without and the possible approach of Susan, than to the immediate matters in her own hand.

Susan came at last, when they had waited a long time for her; she came with a doubtful timid step, and eyes which had been crying: she looked ashamed, mortified, ill at ease, full of dissatisfaction. She came to Lady Umphraville without observing her special guardian, and laid her hand timidly upon the arm of Hugh's mother.

"He has been very angry, and he had reason," said Susan; "and I am ashamed, and don't know what to do: I wish you would come; you make everybody right: dear Lady Umphraville, don't refuse me."

"No, my love," said my lady, rising to go with her instantly.

Susan took courage; she stood still there, looking up into my lady's face.

"What am I to do?" she said; "what should you bid Evelyn do?"

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"Stop!" said Aunt Margaret, interfering with authority, while Susan started at her voice. "I have been waiting here for you, Susan; I beg you not to ask Lady Umphraville's advice. Think over what *I* have said to you; think that I myself, with much less reason, made the sacrifice which honour and virtue require of you; think of *everything* that is involved. Child! I am speaking very seriously; don't suppose it's only what is proper and delicate that a young lady should think about; think over everything, realize your responsibility. I give you a night to think of it, Susan, and I can't believe, after that, that your decision can be anything but what I wish."

"Hush, Margaret! let her alone: the poor child has been too much agitated already," cried my lady, shielding Susan with her arm.

"Unwise kindness! injurious love!" cried the social reformer. "Susan, I expect you to take my words and your own thoughts as your sole counsellors in this matter. Ask no one's advice; go and think of it. Your friends trusted you to my care, not to Lady Umphraville's: I expect you to be guided by me."

"I will not promise that," said Susan, restored to her self-possession; "but I will do what you tell me, Aunt Margaret: I will not ask even my lady's advice, though I know she could guide me better than any one else. I will take all the night to think of it, for everybody's sake—and in the morning I will tell you; but for the rest of the day, please, let me be with my lady; I am safest here—and to-morrow—to-morrow, we will settle all how it is to be."

So saying, Susan followed my lady out of the room, Aunt Margaret making no protest; neither did Lady Umphraville say a word. By-and-by she turned round to Susan and kissed her on the forehead,—that was all; but it comforted the poor girl in her trouble. Susan said very little herself all the evening,—was not melancholy but thoughtful, rather avoided Hugh, and went up very early to her own apartment; where, with her door closed, and no one seeing but the Father in heaven, she was about to fight the first battle in her young life.

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CHAPTER XXII.

NEXT morning saw a partial repetition of the same scene. My lady and Miss Latimer entered the library almost simultaneously, to await the young heroine of this momentous issue. The two ladies eyed each other like two rival armies: they spoke with great politeness—my lady perhaps, as the most angry, being the most civil of the two—until yesterday's argument was reintroduced by Miss Latimer, whose enlightened and philosophical views my lady once more gave battle to with heat and indignation. Lady Umphraville—the mother of five children who lived and of some who were dead, a matron irreproachable, a wife forsaken—supposed, with tolerable reason, that she ought to know better than Aunt Margaret; while Miss Latimer, a philosophical single woman of enlightened views, looked down from her dispassionate height of mental experience upon the woman who *felt* everything, who blushed and resented, who shrank from the mention of one subject and thought another improper, and who was entirely swayed by a common woman's sentiments and prejudices—with becoming compassion; consequently, what loss of temper ensued was more on my lady's side than on her opponent's, though they listened perhaps with equal anxiety for the approach of Susan, who all this morning had not come down-stairs. And we will not inquire too particularly into the temper of Hugh, who waited for Susan in the corridor up-stairs, resolved that she should not meet her inquisitor till she had first satisfied himself. While all this went on, Evelyn sat quite by herself over her embroidery-frame, thinking pathetic thoughts of her bosom friend. Poor Evelyn longed to go to Susan to comfort her, and whisper all kind of tenderness into her ear; but Evelyn had read of such cases in novels, where high-minded young ladies and young gentlemen continually make holocausts of themselves, and was rather divided between fears lest Susan should, and hopes that she might, join the ranks of this band of martyrs. So that a good many agitated minds waited for the country girl's decision, and listened anxiously for the opening of that little chamber door up-stairs.

At last she came into the library, not pale, tearful, nor martyr-like. Susan was very human; she had blushed to meet Hugh, and the blush still lingered upon that open, candid, thoughtful face of hers, where perhaps her Saxon good

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sense and understanding had never before shone so fully. When the blush subsided she looked pale and her eyes were heavy; but she was not despondent; and she carried a book in her hand, and held it clasped in her lap when she sat down. Miss Latimer looked at this with some curiosity; she said, "Well, Susan!" in an expectant, encouraging tone; while my lady said nothing, but only—leaning forward on the table—looked anxiously into Susan's face.

"I have not slept all night," said Susan; "I have not neglected it; I have done all I could to come to a right conclusion; and now, Aunt Margaret, I hope you will listen to what I have to say?"

Aunt Margaret bowed with a little state and dignity. Susan resumed: "I have gone over it all through the night," she said, opening the volume in her hands; "I don't think I have missed a single page: I have sought anxiously through the whole book, especially what our Lord says: and Aunt Margaret—do not be angry—I cannot find a single word to justify me in doing as you say."

"What is it?" cried Aunt Margaret, with a gesture of impatience.

At this, for the first time, Susan looked a little shocked.

"You know, of course, I could mean but one book," she said, in a grieved, reproachful tone; "and, indeed, I have done it honestly, ready to obey whatever was *here*. If Hugh pleases, Aunt Margaret, or if my lady wishes that I should not enter her family, I shall not complain of anything they do,—I shall think them quite justified; but there is not a word in the Bible to warrant me, of my own will, in giving up Hugh."

"Susan! are you mad?—does the Bible provide for every-day emergencies?—do you expect to cheat *me* with such a pious pretence?" cried Aunt Margaret in great anger.

Susan blushed once more painfully,

"I do not wish to cheat any one," she said; "I went to find out my duty here, where I have always been taught to look for it; and I find nothing which could lead me to what you say, unless"—and Susan lowered her voice—"it were that will-worship and voluntary humility which God warns us against."

Miss Latimer was speechless with amazement and disgust; no mode of response could have startled her so much, for this lady patronized the Bible, and recommended it perseveringly. For the first moment she had not another word to answer;

she could not accuse Susan of perverting texts to suit her own purpose, as is the favourite habit of people to whom Bible quotations are uncomfortable, for Susan had made no quotations; she was, in fact, for the time entirely nonplussed and silenced. All this time, my lady did not take the smallest part in the discussion; but her eyes rested on Susan and her Bible with a grateful relief and confidence—Susan, simple, fancies, but to find out what God said—Susan, strong against straightforward, sitting up all night, not to brood over her own all these subtle sophistries, holding up simply her Bible. My lady gazed at her till the tears came to her eyes, and all the time she was thanking God for Hugh.

"Susan!" gasped Miss Latimer, "it is vain to cloke your own selfish inclinations under cover of the Bible: think, I beseech you, before it is too late; think of handing down this curse to other generations; think of your daughter enduring the anguish which you evade; think of bringing children into the world to bear all the horrors of insanity, to live mad, perhaps to die mad, and curse the mother whose selfish passion brought such a fate upon them! Susan, before it is too late, think of what I say!"

"Aunt Margaret, you shock me—you distress me!" cried Susan, unconsciously rising with a burning colour on her face, but something higher than maiden shame in her eyes; "it does not become me to teach you; but do you forget what life is? do you forget that our Lord Jesus came into the world? do you mean that everything ends with us when we die? Oh! my lady, speak to her! it does not become *me;* tell her it is worth while to be born and live, even though we should go mad! tell her that no one must dare to lament over the coming of children, whom the Lord came to die for! Oh! my lady, tell her that to be born is to be born for ever, and that to die and to go mad are only for a time!"

My lady rose by Susan's side, touched to the heart. She took the trembling agitated girl into her arms and kissed her with quivering lips. She turned to the amazed looker-on with a face upon which profound emotion moved like the wind; the tears dropped from her eyes; her lips refused to say common words; her whole form rose and dilated as if with a sudden revelation; for Susan had reached down to the perennial fountain of tears which lies sacred and unseen in the heart of every mother who has seen her children die.

"Margaret," cried my lady, when she could speak, "listen

to the child—listen to her; it is true! I have had children who were only born to pain and trouble; little ones who did not gladden my heart, but rent it with terrors and anxieties which you know nothing of: I watched them dying, innocent little tender angels! in pain that seemed as if it should belong only to guilty creatures like us, dying after a month or two, after a year or two, knowing nothing of life but suffering. You will say, why did they live? but I—I rejoice over them; I take comfort in them! Susan! oh, Susan! I thank God for what you say,—to be born is to be born for ever, and to die is only for a time!" And my lady dropped into her chair and covered her eyes with her hands, for the moment going back out of all these less sacred cares and trials into the old holy grief of her first desolation. Her heart cried for her children, and would not be comforted; yet, with a great joy of anguish, triumphed over the death which was "only for a time!"

And in the presence of this remembered sorrow, great and real, the spectators were hushed as by a spell. Miss Latimer could no more have spoken the scornful words that were at her lips, than if a visible angel had stood before her staying them; and Susan, poor child! only half comprehending the reality which she recognized with awe, fell down upon her knees by my lady's side, kissing her hand, humbly craving pardon, with her looks, for having recalled that mother-agony, which, in its depth, and purity, and heavenly suggestion, was renewing—though Susan knew it not—a heart nearly worn out with meaner cares. My lady never knew how long the interval was; but she rose up from it, her spirit and her frame thrilling with wounds, which were wounds of healing, and her heart, tender and touched, as ready to overflow as her eyes. And her first act was to take Susan once more into her motherly arms and kiss her, which was a pledge of adoption and entire cordial receiving of her among her children. Susan stopped in the whispered pardon she was asking, instinctively feeling this; while Miss Latimer looked on with an involuntary envy, perceiving, by a like instinct, that they had somehow escaped from beyond her reach, and were, for the time, above even her understanding: which consciousness—strange, yet undeniable—was anything but agreeable to one so much used to be the oracle in her sphere.

"I am sorry our discussion should have wounded your feelings, Eleanor," said Miss Latimer at last, with the slightest

inference that the exhibition of these feelings was uncalled for; "but I trust you have recovered yourself, and we must remember that all this is a digression: now we will, if you please, return to Susan."

"No," said my lady, with a smile; "you have satisfied your conscience, and Susan has satisfied hers. I think we have gone quite far enough, Margaret. Susan has her grandmother's sanction to gain, and Hugh his—his father's; and if their natural guardians are content, I am afraid you must be so also; for Susan, at least, has proved nobly how well able she is to judge for herself."

"I throw the responsibility from me," cried Miss Latimer, indignantly; "she has proved how powerful is self-love, and how little response the heroism of self-sacrifice finds in her mind; she shows she has not learned the first lesson of all moral progress, which is self-renunciation."

"Hush! my dear child," said my lady, as Susan watched the dignified and resentful withdrawal of her self-appointed guardian, with a face which looked rather like crying. "Don't be afraid of these fine words. Self-sacrifice is a doubtful virtue, except in very clear and evident circumstances, where God plainly leads, and where it is the highest glory to follow. I don't think Aunt Margaret knows a great deal about self-renunciation, Susan; it is not a thing which one can do once in the grand style and be done with: and there was but One, my child, only One, who had either right or power to sacrifice Himself for the race."

"I thought so," said Susan, looking up to my lady wistfully, and pressing close to her side.

"Who had power to lay down His life, and power to take it up," said my lady, in a reverent voice. "Our self-sacrifices have to be hour by hour and day by day—not once and done with it; and our lives are for God's service, with all their burdens, Susan, and not for voluntary martyrdom. You thought I hesitated yesterday, and, perhaps, I did for a moment; but I thank your little Bible for it—you are on the only ground that cannot be moved." And then my lady leaned upon the girl's shoulder, and began to tell her of those little children who were with God. Why? it would be hard to tell; yet somehow the heart understood it—and the mother drew her new daughter ever closer as she went back with her into the holy shadow of that old tender grief.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

It may very well be supposed that, with so many personal matters on hand of an engrossing nature, Mr. Hugh had quite forgotten the young lady at the rectory. Minnie, however, had by no means forgotten him, and she began to grow curious, eager to know whether she had driven her rival from the field or made Susan jealous, or whether Hugh's flirtation with his sister's friend would end when he left home. Nothing had come of her more active measures,—her tender insinuations of neglect and caprice. Hugh had not returned to the rectory to show her that he was not changed, or even to say good-bye, though Harry announced his departure for to-morrow; so Minnie cleverly contrived that the idea of a call at Heathcote should suggest itself to her Aunt Clarissa, and that the Misses Hardwick and herself should make their way thither on the afternoon of the same day, into which Harry's announcement had concentrated all the hopes of Minnie's present campaign. This young lady, of course, had not the faintest conception of any of those exciting and agitated passages which had made the last few days a most full and eventful period in the family history of Heathcote, nor that she carried with herself the seed of a new romance into that troubled household; for Minnie had met with a little adventure in these days. She had encountered in one of her walks the hero of Evelyn's fancy at the school feast, one of the fashionable Mrs. Hastings' fashionable guests, who, by some of the chances of a large party, had been introduced to and held a little conversation on the same occasion with the rector's niece. This young man was called Wentworth, and was an extremely fine gentleman—quite a paladin and knight of romance, even in the sober eyes of Minnie. She was a little flattered by the cordiality of his greeting, till he brought in (as he thought, with great artfulness and the most entire appearance of innocent indifference) the name of Evelyn, which instantly opened the eyes of the clear-sighted Minnie. Miss Evelyn! She was a little puzzled at first; but by-and-by, perceiving some hopes of mischief, adopted the mistake, and became enthusiastic in praise of Miss Evelyn, who was her bosom friend. Minnie meant no particular harm when she suffered the young stranger to take Evelyn's Christian name for her surname: what could it possibly matter? No doubt he would find it out sometime, and laugh at his blunder; so

Minnie went up to Heathcote fully prepared to teaze Evelyn a little upon her conquest, with a friendly and good-humoured malice, rendered piquant by the knowledge that Evelyn's elevated ideas would make her extremely uncomfortable under this said "teazing," which was so much the better for Minnie.

When the party from the rectory entered the drawing-room at Heathcote, these three ladies did not fail to be impressed, at the first glance, by a certain air, half excitement, half exhaustion, like a calm immediately succeeding to a storm, and immediately, in their three different minds, took upon themselves to account for it. Miss Hardwick supposed there must have been something more in to-day's paper about Sir Philip's constituency, and began to look forward with great relish to finding it when she returned home. Miss Clarissa thought it very likely that my lady began to be troubled with her affairs, and did not know how to manage Heathcote, or perhaps to get money for her bills during Sir Philip's long absence; or that perhaps there was a letter from him, or he might be coming home. Minnie took in the different features of the scene with a sharper eye: she saw Miss Latimer at the further end of the room, writing sedulously and turning her back upon the company; she observed Susan keeping close to my lady, and looking rather shy and tearful, while Evelyn sat absorbed and sympathetic over her embroidery-frame, and Hugh, the rarest and strangest of all, sat reading aloud to them in a very subdued tone, not to disturb his mother, who was reading letters, or Aunt Margaret, who—indignantly withdrawn in her corner—was manufacturing the same. All this Minnie took a note of as she stood within the door of the Heathcote drawing-room. "Something has happened," said Minnie to herself; "I do believe he has proposed, and Miss Latimer won't have it. Oh! Aunt Margaret, my trust is in thee;" apostrophized Susan's alarmed rival wickedly; and Minnie determined to devote herself to Miss Latimer, if nothing better offered, and find out what made that lady angry, a task of which—lofty as Aunt Margaret was—her little critic did not feel afraid.

"What news? This is a very unlikely place for news," said my lady, in answer to Miss Hardwick; "it is we who should ask you; for, unless it were Edie's lessons, or Harry's scrapes, or old Gregory's complaints of the lad that helps him in the garden, I don't think we have any news here."

"Oh! I saw the paper on the table: there's sometimes a great deal in the paper," said Miss Hardwick: "but you get the

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Times, don't you? So, of course, all the news is old in the *Sussex Gazette*—except local news, of course. Did you see our Demonstration in last week's number? But the worst of a country paper is its personality: one is sure always to find some one abused."

"Good fun, is it not?" said Hugh, ill-naturedly.

Miss Hardwick blushed. This was rather literal: "It depends entirely upon the person," she said, with a momentary asperity. "You should have seen our party the other day, my lady: in the rectory we are supposed to have filled the other side with confusion; but I don't believe it, for my own part; and I hope you mean to draw your purse liberally. We shall have no church-rate in Broadmead."

"My sister always comforts us with the worst view of a subject," said Miss Clarissa. "What a delightful old person Lady Curtis is! I had a great deal of conversation with her: she is so clever, has such original views upon every subject; and she said, indeed, she would speak to some Members of Parliament, and try what can be done about it. Is it not odious that a poor creature of a Dissenter should actually have it in his power to take our pretty church from us? For, of course, if it gets unroofed and falls into decay, nobody can worship there."

"That is putting the case strongly," said my lady.

"Ah! my lady, Clarissa thinks of the emissary of Satan," said Miss Hardwick; "but let me see: I know we heard some news of Heathcote this morning—Why, Master Hugh, you are going away!"

"Yes," said Hugh, with no particular good-breeding. Master Hugh did not think Miss Hardwick's jokes at all agreeable, when he himself was the subject of them.

"And a very good thing too. I hear there is *such* a satisfactory church feeling among the young men at Oxford," said Miss Clarissa; "quite different from the old way, when they corrupted each other with their wine-parties and things. And which college are you to join, Mr. Umphraville!"

"Oh! Balliol, is it not? *I* remember," said Minnie, softly; "I used to hear you talk of it last year. Oh! Evelyn, haven't you got it in a picture? I should so like to see it! is it one of those dear picturesque old places with ivy, and oriel windows and beautiful gardens, Mr. Hugh? Wouldn't it be delightful, Evelyn, to think of him there?"

"Thank you," said Hugh, with a little blush of vexation; for Susan had lifted her dewy eyes, which the morning's con-

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ference had softened into pathos, and had turned them with an arch look of inquiry upon Minnie. "I am delighted to think it's exactly the reverse; they're building there now, which makes it very romantic and poetical, of course, Miss Minnie."

"Ah! you like to vex me," said Minnie, with another glance at him, which made innocent Hugh feel extremely uncomfortable. It revived immediately all the unpleasant consciousness of their last meeting. Hugh became very red, very impatient, considerably more ashamed than a girl would have been, to whom, in the presence of other people, a disagreeable somebody insisted on making love.

"It is not one of the pretty colleges," said Evelyn, bringing a book of engravings. "Susan and I were just looking at it, and wishing it had been Magdalen, or Oriel, or one of those colleges that people go to in books. I suppose Oriel is not so very nice either; but it is a very pretty name."

"Does Miss Mitford care for such things? Oh, dear! I should not have thought she minded a name," said Minnie, looking at Susan, who was looking at her, and who blushed a little to meet her eye. And then it came into Hugh's mind about "the sweet, mild disposition which would not feel anything much," and he felt a most ungallant inclination to punish Minnie.

"But speaking of a name, Evelyn," whispered this young lady, leading Evelyn to another corner for a little confidential communication, "do you know I met some one the other day who thought yours the sweetest in the world? Oh! you saw him at the school feast. I *know* you noticed him, and he had asked some one and had heard your name. It was such fun to hear him, how he came round about and round about, always back to you, and always 'Miss Evelyn.' If I would have talked to him, I am sure he would have stood in the middle of the road all day. Ah! Evie, you blush, though you pretend not to care."

"Pray don't speak so, Minnie," cried Evelyn, in great trouble; "why should I blush? only because you talk so; and I'm sure I don't know at all who you mean."

At which statement Evelyn blushed again, a blush which burned her cheeks; for this time it was not true, and Evelyn felt it, and was so much ashamed of her first fib, that she could have sunk into the ground, had that been possible. Minnie, though she had so very little sympathy with it, knew Evelyn well enough to understand that flush of guiltiness, and laughed

and "teased" the more, as she whispered further particulars of the interview. There was a fascination in the story, though it distressed poor Evelyn's delicacy and burdened her conscience. She could not help a little heart-beat when her unknown hero's questions about herself were repeated to her, and trembled with secret dread lest mamma or Susan should ask the subject of this secret conference. In the meantime no one took any notice of it but Miss Latimer, who was not offended with Evelyn, though she was with the rest of the family; and who came forward, when Minnie was in the middle of her tale, and startled both by laying a hand on each of their shoulders. "Poor children! what are you talking about?" asked Miss Latimer, looking down upon them with the benevolence of superior age. Evelyn sprang aside with a tell-tale face; but Minnie seized the opportunity: it was exactly what she wanted. "We were talking of Mr. Hugh's college, and of his journey: I believe he goes to-morrow," said Minnie, with a very audible sigh.

"I believe so," said Miss Latimer, austerely; "but you seem much interested in Mr. Hugh's movements: how is this, dear?"

"I? Oh dear no! I assure you—not in the least," cried Minnie, with a little break in her voice, admirably managed. "Oh! indeed, not at all; I beg you won't think so, Miss Latimer: only—only it's so sudden, and he used to come so often to Broadmead."

Miss Latimer looked at Minnie with a most penetrating, scrutinizing eye; and an innocent looker-on might have supposed that this tender and delicate girl could not bear the acute vision which reached into her heart. Minnie's head drooped; she cast down her eyes; she had all the appearance of blushing, whether she really did accomplish that feat or no: and Miss Latimer, taking courage by these signs, which so good a judge pronounced infallible, took Minnie's hand into her own with tender sympathy, and whispered,—"My dear, I must speak to you further; I see your heart is full. Hush! no one observes us; I will see you, my poor suffering child! to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" said Minnie with a sigh; and Miss Latimer thought that to-morrow, to this unfortunate victim of unrequited love, was the blank which comes after a sentence of death.

Meanwhile, the two innocent ladies at the other end of the room carried on their talk with Lady Umphraville, quite unconscious of the interesting circumstances in which their niece had placed herself; and Susan went quietly on with her work, not without an occasional glance at Minnie, slightly

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tinctured with jealousy, while Evelyn was her companion, but quite sparkling and full of mirth, when Miss Latimer took the vacant place; and Hugh, unaware of the evidences of his guilt, which gradually impressed themselves on the mind of Aunt Margaret, kept behind Susan's chair, which was close to my lady's, and threw in a word occasionally to the stock of the conversation,—deporting himself with considerable good-humour, but not showing that sensibility which Miss Clarissa said might have been expected from him on the eve of leaving home. "Very glad to go, eh?" said Miss Hardwick. "Oh! I think you're quite right; a young man has no business at home,—no, not even when there's wool to wind, and pretty young ladies. Now, Miss Mitford, don't blush, there's a dear! *your* work is quite sensible and proper, a very pretty pattern; and I am sure you were thinking of your grandmamma when you did this sprig. Look, my lady, that is how young people work now-a-days! and you see that comes of thinking too much of dear old ladies in the country, and the delights of going home."

"Is it for your grandmamma? a very pretty present, to be sure, and such a nice shape for an old lady," said Miss Clarissa, for whose intervention Susan was very grateful.

However, Susan's statement that the shape was a new fashion, instantly awakened Miss Clarissa's curiosity. She called Minnie to her immediately to see and note it. Minnie and Miss Latimer parted with a glance of mutual pity for the frivolities which interrupted their communion of hearts; and Minnie came forward briskly to look at the collar which Susan was embroidering, and to enter into an animated discussion of the new shape. She did it with complete self-possession, the young dissembler casting occasional timid glances at Hugh and directing pretty little clever sayings, with a point in them, at Susan, whom, of all the persons present, Minnie felt most afraid of; and presently, when the ladies from the rectory took their leave, Minnie pouted, held out her hand to Hugh, averted her head, and said, "I suppose we must not hope to see you again," with such excellent success, that my lady, who heard the words, looked concerned for the moment. And Hugh blushed,—poor Hugh! he was quite ashamed for Minnie, and could not understand why she should make herself look so foolish; while Evelyn sat working very industriously at her embroidery, thinking it very wrong to think over what she had just heard. Minnie had done very good execution for one day.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

The very next morning after, with no very particular good-will for it, nor satisfaction in leaving home, Hugh went away. He was closeted for some time with my lady, who gave him her motherly advice with fervour and earnestness. She was not much afraid of the common vices; perhaps, mother-like, she thought her boy superior to them; but at least, she did not think that, with herself and his sisters looking to him for future protection, and with Susan Mitford's honest affections pledged to him, Hugh stood in peril of vulgar vices: but my lady was eloquent on the subject of temper, quite as much—Hugh thought—as the occasion required, and a great deal more so than she would have been, had not one fear—forgotten for a day, but soon recalled again—hung, sore and heavy, on her heart. Nor was the parting without a mixture of painful anxiety. My lady did not know if she might ever welcome her son again to the house in which he was born; and Hugh, reluctantly leaving her, could not help an indignant thought of what might happen here before he returned. On that subject he had carefully instructed Evelyn, with all a young man's ignorance, as to what she was to do. If Sir Philip returned during his absence, Evelyn, without asking her mother's permission, was to send at once for her brother. "Send one of the servants to Brighton with a message, which he must take to the telegraph," said Hugh: "remember, Evelyn, I will never forgive you, if you fail me! Do not ask my lady, do not hesitate a moment; but whenever he arrives, send John or William off express to Brighton. Write 'He has come,' and I'll be with you in a few hours."

"Yes, Hugh," said Evelyn doubtfully, "if I can; but mamma might be angry, and—oh! you are so impatient!—what good would it do?"

"Good? why, don't you see, I *must* be here to take care of my mother," cried the young man.

Evelyn shook her head, but gave a very hesitating assent: she did not see the necessity. Evelyn was not wise, but she had a woman's insight into a limited number of personal concerns. Though the subject had never been mentioned between them, Evelyn knew perfectly well that my lady was afraid of Hugh's presence at home when Sir Philip returned: she would not betray her mother's secret; but she could not encourage

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Hugh's self-delusion either; and she was very thankful when Susan appeared, to chase all these secondary concerns from the mind of her young lover. So he was fairly gone at last, with his mother's counsels and Evelyn's tearful farewell and Susan's heart; and, though plenty of life, vigour, and action remained behind, it is astonishing how blank this household of women looked all day, after the fiery young life, imperative, impatient, making so many claims upon them, had departed out of the house. Even Miss Latimer felt the change: my lady was grave and quiet; the girls got into corners, whispering to each other, and took a long, long afternoon walk by themselves, feeling a most unwonted and undesirable leisure, and talking of Hugh. Miss Latimer felt it was quite a relief to set out on her promised expedition to Broadmead, not only for the comfort of Minnie and the satisfaction of her doubts respecting Hugh, but even for the entirely personal advantage of a little animation and change of scene. Miss Latimer rather prided herself on being a good walker; and the frosty air was by no means unpleasant, even on the Downs, where there was a fair share of it. At the extremity of the village green she encountered Minnie in the same sister-of-charity cloak, which had once been assumed for Hugh's benefit, and with the same little basket on her arm. Miss Latimer was not a Lady Bountiful, but she rather patronized those who were; saying it was a very good thing when people could make themselves happy with Sunday schools and district visiting, and she believed saved many from thoughts which would make them very uncomfortable. Her address to Minnie was something in this style: "Comforting yourself with good works, my dear? Ah! that is a safe way to get over the troubles of life," said Miss Latimer.

"It is very hard work sometimes," said Minnie, casting down her eyes.

Her new friend thought, on looking at her, that this poor girl had spent a sleepless night, and was very sad this morning: she drew Minnie's hand within her arm with tender friendliness. "My dear, I could perceive how you were suffering yesterday; I see you have conquered yourself, but still have a wounded heart to-day," said Aunt Margaret. "Confide in me: I don't ask you from mere curiosity; I have a very serious object in my inquiries. Hugh Umphraville has won your heart, and then thrown it away. My child, believe that I feel for you most truly, and understand your womanly struggles;

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but, as you would preserve another innocent heart from the same fate, tell me how it was."

"Oh, Miss Latimer! indeed, I never meant that you should think anything like this!" cried Minnie, considerably dismayed, and quite unprepared for the extent of this examination.

"No, I daresay not," said Miss Latimer with a smile of conscious wisdom; "but few people can deceive me in such matters. My dear, be frank with me; I assure you it is of the greatest importance to another."

"What other? Do you mean that anything has happened? that he—that Hugh—that Mr. Umphraville has done anything wrong?" cried Minnie, clasping her hands together; "Oh! I could bear anything but that!"

"Compose yourself, my dear; he has been trifling with the affections of another," said Miss Latimer: "that is the whole. Some people think it a very venial offence; but I am interested in this young creature: I could wish her eyes to be opened; I could wish her to know how selfish men are in everything which concerns women. For the sake of a dear young sister of your own sex, tell me, my love, how you have been deceived."

"Dear Miss Latimer, don't ask me; I dare say it was all my own fault; I daresay he never meant anything," said Minnie, skilfully evading all particulars; "and though one can't help one's feelings, I am sure I have not betrayed myself to any one but you, and that is because you know so well. But if it is Miss Mitford, dear Miss Latimer—oh! I feel sure he loves her!—don't say anything of me."

"You are very disinterested, my dear," said Miss Latimer, drawing Minnie's arm within her own for a still more confidential communication, "but to tell the truth, I don't wish Susan to marry. I don't think it right that she should marry. She is, I am sorry to say, a headstrong and selfish girl, and will not listen to the teachings of duty. There is, you will be careful not to mention it, but I am sure I may confide in you—there is insanity in Susan's family. In Northumberland, people call them the crazy Mitfords—and a girl of your high principle will easily conceive what I feel, having been the means of bringing her into the family, to know that she is engaged, and obstinately persists in her engagement, to Hugh."

Minnie's "Oh!" of amazement and dismay, was quite sincere. Minnie did not care a straw for the insanity business; but the engagement was afflictive: nevertheless, she took hope

when she thought of it. The crazy Mitfords! Surely there was some ground for working here; but while Miss Latimer went on with the tale of her own endeavours and Susan's resistance, Minnie was rapidly weighing the whole matter in her mind, and resolving not to "betray herself" any further, but to withdraw as quickly and gracefully as possible from her interesting position of victim. It had been amusing enough to take in Miss Latimer, but Minnie had certainly felt a little ashamed of herself once or twice during the conversation; and now that she had gained this unhoped-for intelligence, saw no further advantage to be obtained by prolonging the cheat. So when Aunt Margaret once more urged her young friend to be frank and tell her all, that Susan's eyes might be opened, Minnie answered, with a lively appearance of distress, "I feel quite sure I have deceived you: oh! I have deceived myself, Miss Latimer," said Minnie. "Indeed, indeed you must believe me now. I have only been foolish, because I never saw any one else. I am not very old—nor very experienced—" murmured the suffering girl with a sigh between each sentence, "and I thought things meant more than they did mean. Oh! Miss Latimer, don't say anything of me: I have only myself to blame."

"You have a true woman's heart," said Miss Latimer, affectionately pressing Minnie's hand; and Minnie blushed—actually blushed—though she was inclined to laugh the next moment, and only covered her own confusion by the consolation of ridiculing her companion.

"And I am determined to think of it no more," said Minnie, with spirit. "With your kind assistance, I shall conquer myself; and oh! do not tell any one, Miss Latimer, that poor Minnie gave her—her—regard, unsought. Tell me rather of Miss Mitford: is it really true? and she, who might have been so happy! Oh, I do so feel for her: *I* am used to disappointments. It is harder on her than me."

"My dear! I wish Susan had you for a friend," cried Miss Latimer, energetically; "but she will not see her duty. She does not comprehend self-sacrifice. I can only trust to time, and better understanding, and what persuasions I can use; and if this young man is of a fickle disposition, Susan may yet be saved." Minnie made no answer: she had said all she meant to say, and fully intended now that her adviser should carry on the conversation by herself. When Miss Latimer found this out, she was by no means unwilling: she thought

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it quite natural that the young girl in distress should seek her counsel, and during the remainder of their walk bestowed no end of encouragement and sympathy upon Minnie; whose grateful reception of the same, more and more convinced Aunt Margaret that here, indeed, was a girl after her own heart. She took the most affectionate farewell of her as they came up to the rectory gate, whence Harry Umphraville came forth with a leap, which nearly upset the confidential pair outside. Harry thought it capital fun, though he made something like an apology; but was fitly punished by discovering, the next moment, that he was to have so formidable a companion as Miss Latimer on his way home. The boy tried very hard to invent an errand into the village, as Aunt Margaret turned with him from the rectory gate; but, scorning to tell a lie about it, marched manfully forward when he could not help himself, meaning at least to make the "old lady" out of breath ere she reached Heathcote. The "old lady" had no such intention; she began to "enter into conversation" with the boy, adapting her remarks to his age and capacity, as was to be expected from a person of her acquirements. "Is the rector a nice teacher, Harry? Does he make your lessons interesting?" asked Miss Latimer, fixing her eyes upon her unwilling companion.

"Interesting? Greek! Oh! doesn't he?" cried Harry, kicking an unoffending stone, which lay in his way, with unquestionable emphasis. Miss Latimer smiled. She thought it quite a good example of the artless exhibition of youthful feelings.

"I dare say you'd like a story better," she continued. Boys are always doubtful of those students of natural history who select the genus *homo* for their subject. Though Harry loved stories, he did not admire the question. He said, "I don't know—a lot of stories are no good," with a little surliness; and kept kicking the stones before him with devotion, decidedly preferring that amusement to the talk. "But there are some stories which are some good, eh, Harry? 'Robinson Crusoe,' for instance," said Miss Latimer. Could anything be better calculated for the capacity of a boy? Yet, somehow, this boy, ungratefully chafed by so nice an adaptation of the subject to his capacity, quite growled at it in boyish disdain. "I'm old enough to read what other people read," said Harry. He felt quite insulted in his youthful dignity; so Miss Latimer, ever amiable, changed the subject.

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"Your brother used to go a great deal to the rectory, Harry?" she inquired, in her gentlest tone. It was as well to use all sources of information.

"Rothes did when he was reading with old Hardwick: I suppose it's him you mean," said Harry.

"Oh, no! Hugh, your eldest brother; he used to go?" said Miss Latimer.

"He was never such a fool!" cried Harry; "oh! catch Hugh boring himself to death with a lot of old rubbish; and he never could bear *that* Minnie and the old ladies; *I* don't mind them a bit, though they talk for ever: but you see, Hugh was a fellow who could not stand that: he was not used to it, like me."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Latimer.

"And they *are* just enough for any one's patience," cried Harry, warming into volubility. "I don't mind old Miss Hardwick so much, for she has got some fun in her; but I hate that old Clarissa; and Minnie, she thinks she's pretty, *she* does: but I'd rather have Betty, the dairy-maid. I don't think she's a bit pretty, do you?"

"Really, I can't say; what did Hugh think?" asked Miss Latimer.

"Hugh!" Harry gave a long whistle of disdain. "I don't believe he ever thought anything about her in his life; only, to be sure, he couldn't bear her—just like me." Miss Latimer smiled. She thought this the strangest instance of that facility with which one human being can cheat another, or, indeed, many others: but she could not have supposed it possible that the poor, suffering, heart-broken Minnie stood, at the same moment, thinking the same thoughts, at her chamber window—laughing, yet feeling a little ashamed, to remember how easily she had cheated Miss Latimer.

CHAPTER XXV.

Time, however, went on after these events with great quietness, leaving a lull in the family history: even Minnie could make no further progress in her schemes. Hugh had begun his academic life, but did not excel in correspondence, unless it might be in that portion of the Heathcote letter-bag, which

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found its way to Miss Mitford's room; and everything proceeded quietly in that household, which still waited for its fate, without taking any independent step on its own account. As the winter darkened, Sir Philip's constituency grumbled more and more: there was yet no appearance of his return, no answer to their indignant address to him. In those long nights, when people had time to congregate and to talk, the good borough of Hustings found great amusement in Sir Philip's backslidings: they prophesied indignantly that he would not come home; that, in all likelihood, for another session, the opinion of this influential constituency should remain without a voice in Parliament. There were speeches made about it, denouncing the erring and absent representative, as a traitor to public faith and domestic virtue; and the agitation culminated in another indignant address to Sir Philip, calling upon him to resign a charge, the duties of which he had disregarded so long. To suppose how eagerly all the servants and dependants of Heathcote looked for this newspaper is easy enough; nor is it difficult to fancy how my lady perceived the swelling of this little storm: she watched it with strange fancies of how it would reach her husband; what effect upon him even these familiar names might have; what thoughts must rise in his own mind of all the duties he had forsaken, of the vacant place which he had once filled, but never could fill again. Did he know that?—did he understand that he never could fill it again?—my lady unconsciously questioned with herself, as she sat in the quietness of those unbroken days, her hands busy about some woman's work; her thoughts, in spite of herself, pursuing this thread. She was eased at her heart by Hugh's absence: she thought, if Sir Philip would but come now, what a relief it would be; and then her mind digressed to speculate upon her new life, to arrange the lessened household, and think how she could provide for Edith's education and Evelyn's introduction into the world. By this time, the edge had worn off her first excitement; but when she thought of her separate house, where only Evelyn and Edie should represent the family, and of all the contraction and narrowing of sphere and habits which must ensue, it was not possible that my lady could imagine this without a pang of quick resentment at her heart.

In the meantime, Miss Latimer had made up her mind neither to quarrel with my lady nor to relinquish her charge of Susan. If Hugh was of fickle mind, given to winning hearts

and to breaking them, there was still good hope that her interesting young friend might escape out of his toils; not to speak of all Miss Latimer's own powers, which she would not fail to exercise on Susan. So Aunt Margaret recovered her good-humour, and began seriously to incline towards Evelyn, who was very "impressionable," and capable, poor child! of any amount of foolish generosity. Miss Latimer had engaged to spend Christmas at the house of another friend in a distant part of the country, whither Susan prepared to accompany her with anything but good-will; and my lady showed great inclination to accede to the proposal which Aunt Margaret made to her, of placing Evelyn under her charge for a month or two during the spring, which Miss Latimer proposed spending in London, in order that the young people might see something of the great world. My lady's conscience had been grieved with the thought of Evelyn; she thought it very hard that this young creature should be entirely debarred from the society of her equals, and she was glad to think of sending her away, perhaps, from the midst of her own troubled arrangements, to enjoy the first holiday of life with such a safe companion as Susan. Amidst such modest enjoyment of the gaieties of the season as was to be obtained in the "circle" of an unmarried lady of tolerable fashion, and with Susan at hand to counteract any pressing evil, my lady did not fear to trust her child to all the influences of Miss Latimer.

John Anthony had made another visit to Heathcote, on his way from London to Northumberland. He had a long private audience in the library, from which my lady came forth with a troubled brow. John Anthony had come armed with the learning of the law, to which he had been devoting himself, and the result of his inquiries was not very satisfactory. The law had little help and still less sympathy for the deserted wife. My lady was angry, as it is scarcely possible for a woman not to be when she comprehends how she stands in the eye of authority; but her anger, which was transitory, soon giving way to thoughts too grave and anxious for resentment, was nothing to the mighty wrath of John Anthony. He had been able, as some unmarried men are, to keep fresh in his heart the veneration of his youth for women, and he had an unbounded admiration for my lady. To think of all her comfort, her means of living, her children, being in the hands of a dissolute husband, who had forsaken her, seemed to John Anthony the most horrible injustice. He would have freed

her by one indignant stroke, as a man is freed from a dishonoured wife. He refused to consider the restrictions of nature,—the inevitable disadvantages of a woman; but if he had been a man given to speech, would have railed against the law more bitterly and with an angrier feeling of injury, than if the case had been his own. But, fortunately, for my lady, John Anthony was not a man of words. When he had discharged his commissions, he went away, well pleased to escape to his hermitage at Redesdale, indemnifying himself for his inability to save her by the renewed care which he took of her land, though even then the thought sometimes crossed him bitterly that all his improvements might turn to the advantage of Sir Philip, instead of the comfort of my lady,—a thought which made the north-countryman grind his teeth, and break into muttered exclamations, which were not at all of a polite character, nor likely to increase his reputation as "a canny man."

Meanwhile, my lady's thoughts, more and more after what he had told her, settled into deep and painful consideration of her future mode of action. She was like a shipwrecked sailor; she had no time to think of the mismanagement which had caused the wreck, or the law which would still be hard upon the survivors: for the present, her whole mind was bent upon how to save as much as possible out of the wreck, and this was a matter difficult enough to occupy her entire thoughts. Susan's grandmother had been appealed to, and had heartily sanctioned her engagement. She could trust even her only earthly hope and darling, the old lady said, with a son of Eleanor's; for, fortunately, grandmamma could manage to forget, knowing nothing of him, that Hugh had also a father. No inducement, however, could move Hugh even so far as to announce to Sir Philip his betrothal: he refused indignantly to suffer Susan's name to be named to his father; he would undertake no communication whatever, especially on that subject, with the absent head of the household, and in this determination he was quite immovable. When it was decided that Susan should go with Miss Latimer to spend the Christmas elsewhere, my lady intrigued, in the most unkind and unmotherly way, to procure an invitation for Hugh. Her heart beat high with a presentiment of Sir Philip's return. She would almost have done anything in the world to keep Hugh absent in that time of family reunion; but the young man was so indignant at the thought, that she had to choose

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between a certain evil and a possible one, and to relinquish her machinations.

So Christmas was coming—Christmas, when Rothes came home, when Hugh came home, when Henry and Edie, oblivious of all misfortunes, danced about in the high glee and triumph of universal holiday. It was enough for the children that this *was* Christmas; *they* wanted no reason for being merry—only an excuse.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It *was* Christmas, and they were all at home—all but *one*. All at home, and not a stranger here to disturb the family. Ah! those family meetings, when we are young, when all interests settle under the common roof-tree, and all the emulations are brotherly! Family meetings are different when we grow old,—when we bring husbands and wives with us, whose warmest associations are not the associations of our childhood, —when we measure ourselves against the wives and husbands of our brothers and sisters, and have some certain point of rivalry with everybody, if it were only which has the finest infant, or which the tallest boy. But as long as you are all under five-and-twenty, young people, oh! make jubilee, riot, any exuberance you please, all for that joy which will not last for ever,—the joy of reaching home.

It was the day after Christmas—rather it was the evening—so late, that Edie had been sent to bed, and Harry had received warnings. My lady sat near the fire, where the warm light came full upon her, reading. Her dress was of brown velvet, rich and heavy, falling about her—as she leaned back in a low easy chair—in sumptuous folds: her soft rounded white hands, one of which held a book, while one had dropped by her side, came softly forth from snowy puffs of cambric and frills of lace. The same delicate mass of whiteness appeared at the open stomacher of her gown, and round her throat; her hair was partially covered with a little cap of rich lace, with red and white roses in it. She had a fluctuating colour in her cheek, the result of a vague anxiety which she could not overcome; but with the warm rays of the firelight trembling upon her, and the domestic peace surrounding her, was as fair a picture of a matron and mother as one could wish to see. Not far from her, Evelyn sat on a stool before Rothes, leaning

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her head on her hands, with two or three delicate fingers tangled among her dark hair, looking up half smiling, half attending, half astray, while he told some of his school stories, with all a schoolboy's animation. Rothes had grown very tall and big, during the last six months: he was nearly as tall, and of a bigger mould than Hugh, deeply sunburnt, and with a bullet head, clustered with black curls,—a bold young Hercules, fearing nothing. It was very like old times, this scene: Rothes telling his boy's story,—an eager narrative of some surpassing piece of bravery done by "one of our fellows;" Harry listening in rapt and curious interest; Evelyn looking up with her dove's eyes, half smiling, half dreaming, half listening to the tale. Hugh, at the table, was sealing an envelope, his face thrown into higher light by the light of the taper. It was not a letter to Susan,—these were accomplished in privacy; but it was almost as good,—a packet containing a little book to be sent to her, which Susan was certain to be interested by, from the well authenticated *à priori* evidence of Hugh's interest in the same. This room had not much the look of a blighted, desolated house—so, at least, thought one unseen spectator, who stood in the darkness looking in. The curtains had not been drawn at one of the windows which looked out on the lawn: here Rothes had been pointing out the stars to Evelyn when lights were brought in, and here the two had remained until the servant had quitted the room, when neither of the young students of astronomy troubled themselves at all about the curtains. My lady had already started once or twice, at the fancied sound of a step without; but she had heard steps in her imagination so long and so often, that they ceased to chill her with terror as they used to do. Yet there was a foot on that damp wintry ground, and by the uncurtained window stood Sir Philip, looking in upon his wife and his children,—looking in, a spectator, into his own house. What were the mingled emotions in his mind it would be hard to tell. He was rather a little alarmed, in the first place, for the scene he expected to encounter; he was glad to see my lady and the children; he was rather ashamed of himself; and withal he could not help an involuntary comparison between himself standing here, free to enter, the master of all, and that degraded miserable woman who had lately been his companion, but whom no repentance or pardon could ever carry safely again over the threshold of the house she had dishonoured. He was not a man of feeling, yet he thought of it

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involuntarily, shrugged his shoulders, murmured "Poor wretch!" and, dismissing the idea, watched with a little natural pleasure the movements of his sons and his daughter, and began to think over—with embarrassment certainly, but with no great agitation—all the set words which he had been meditating on his way home.

Sir Philip Umphraville was not a man of very decided character: nothing could have made him a great criminal, as nothing could have made him a hero or a martyr; he was a man of mixed and uncertain mind, like most other people; his conscience was obtuse. He was rather glad, for his own part, to be released from a false position; and it did not occur to him that others were likely to judge his foolishness more harshly than he himself did—for he was quite ready at this present moment to acknowledge that he had been "a d——d fool;" to confess that his wife was worth a thousand such as the woman for whom he had forsaken her, and that he was highly relieved to find himself once more at home. Sir Philip's great mistake was simply that he expected everybody else to be as much relieved as he was; he had consoled himself long ago by saying that he could not help it. Now, he was quite ready to believe that, after so long an absence, whatever my lady might think it proper to say at first, the whole house would open its arms with joy to receive him home. So he stood at the window looking in, a little abashed and troubled about his first appearance among them, yet taking quite an innocent and natural pleasure, as you might call it, in watching his children; feeling really grateful in his way to see them again, and, with the happiest facility, leaping over the great gulf of that absence of his, scarcely a year in time, and still smaller in effect, Sir Philip thought, as far as he himself was concerned. Still he hesitated, not quite able to screw himself up to the point; but the wintry rain came on and began to drizzle about the ears of the returned sinner. A delay of half-an-hour before he encountered my lady's reproaches would, it seemed to Sir Philip, be rather dearly purchased by a wetting; so he left the garden cautiously enough, yet not so softly as to keep the sound of his retreating step from the anxious ears of my lady, who started at the sound, listened, cast an anxious glance on Hugh, and, after a little time, stole to the window, her heart beating heavily. It had come on to rain; it might be only the shower pattering upon the fallen leaves. My lady sat down again, with a sick fluttering at her heart. This time she took a chair near

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the door, and dropped into it noiselessly, holding even her breath, irritated beyond measure by Hugh's movements and the rustling of his paper, yet terrified to bid him be quieter. Her heart was in her mouth, as people say; her whole frame was strained to listen. Hush! it must have been the rain; but then again, what was that? A distant sound of wheels drawing up the ascent! it might be any one; it might be one of Hugh's friends—Miss Latimer—anybody! And now Hugh's dog bursts forth in a loud outbreak of barking: dogs bark at all comers—there is nothing in that to be afraid of. Now the great door sweeps open: is it imagination or reality which makes my lady feel to her heart the blast of December wind that sweeps in through the open door? Now a pause. The children are all listening now—Rothes and Hugh flushing red—Evelyn turning pale—no one moving. "Never mind! go on; it is nothing!" cries my lady imperatively; but even then, even at the moment,—oh heaven! what is that voice! Sir Philip's voice speaking in the hall,—the well-known, long-loved, familiar tone; the very words they all know. Evelyn cries aloud, springs forward, flies to her mother; Hugh, starting violently, throws down his little packet, his love-token, and strides towards the door. He has nearly reached it when his mother clings to his arm with almost wild authority.

"Hugh! be silent! stand back! Sir! do you hear your mother?" Alarmed, amazed, grasping her hand to support her, Hugh turned back; and that was how they stood together, mother and son, when Sir Philip entered the room. He came, gravely ushered in, without a word, by the old butler; he stood within the threshold, looking at them all, for a moment. He was not affected by their strained and powerful emotion; but he was very much embarrassed and ashamed of himself; he looked rather a pitiful figure as he stood before his boys, with his back against the door. "Ah! here I am, you see," said Sir Philip, "newly arrived and desperately cold and hungry. How d'ye do, Eleanor? very glad to find you looking so cozy: one relishes coming home, I can tell you, after a journey in such a night." Hugh made a step forward in defiance, meaning, in his fiery young indignation, to demand how Sir Philip dared to enter his mother's presence; but it did not need the voice of my lady to prevent him: in another moment the youth stood trembling, silenced. It was his father, there he stood,—it might be, guilty; it might be, disgraced; it might be, contemptible; but still his father, strong in the inalienable

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rights of nature. Hugh's lip quivered, his voice was choked: he turned away, giving up even his mother's hand, to cover his face with his own in shame, which was all the deeper, because he could not accompany it with resentment; and thus, though Rothes stood darkly red by the chair from which he had risen, and Evelyn kept close behind her mother, my lady met her husband alone. "What the devil do you mean," cried Sir Philip, "staring at me as though I were a ghost? What's all this play, my lady? If you think I'm going to play penitent before these boys, you're in a deuced mistake, I can tell you. Here, Evie, come here, child, and kiss your father!" Evelyn came forward slowly, as pale as marble. He kissed her white cheek roughly, stared at her, and, thrusting her aside, went forward to the fire, where he threw himself into an easy-chair. Sir Philip comforted himself by thinking he had very good reason to be angry; he whistled, and his repentance evaporated in the whistle: already he was an ill-used man! And my lady, whose strength had failed her at this crisis, and who had found nothing to say, who scarcely felt anything but the tingling and thrilling at her heart, had to bestir herself now. "Ring the bell, Rothes," she said; "your father wants refreshments. Evelyn, you may take Harry up-stairs; and you need not come down again, my love, if you feel fatigued: good night! Have you dined, Sir Philip?"

"Dined! Oh, d—— it all! this is what you call welcoming a man home," said the penitent husband, poking the fire fiercely and turning his back upon them all. My lady said nothing more. When the butler made his appearance, she ordered particularly the "refreshment" which Sir Philip had declared himself in need of. He heard every word she said as she gave directions about it; he could not help noticing how she recollected his tastes and thought of the things he liked best. Nobody had troubled themselves about Sir Philip's tastes in eating and drinking, since he left Heathcote; once more he became grateful—once more the feeling of satisfaction in getting home, returned. "To be sure, poor Nelly was jealous—and very natural," he said to himself with an involuntary smile; and, getting up again, planted himself with his back to the fire, willing to extend the olive branch once more.

"Well, Rothes, my boy! home for the holidays?" said Sir Philip. "Shake hands; you've grown a couple of inches since I saw you: we'll have a day or two's good sport, I promise you, before you go back to Rugby. How's Edie? in

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bed, the little puss! and Hugh—sullen, sir? what do you mean by going off into a corner when you see me, eh?"

"Because I can't welcome you, and because I can't defy you; you 're my father," said Hugh, abruptly. He had gone to the window where Sir Philip had looked in, and stood now looking out into the darkness, vainly trying to compose himself; conscious that both father and mother were looking at him, and that whatever my lady might have to bear, she had not found a defender in her son, her sworn champion.

But Sir Philip had reasons of his own for avoiding a quarrel with Hugh. He took no notice of his son's undutiful speech; but as my lady returned from the door where she had been giving directions about his room, her husband went up to her with a new resolution of having it all out, and throwing his arm carelessly round her, was about to kiss her. My lady shrank from him with almost passionate haste: holding her hand upon her cheek, almost, as it seemed, with an instinctive motion to cool its burning crimson, she recoiled from his embrace. "You forget yourself, Sir Philip," she cried, "or you forget me. This is your own house, and you are master here; but nothing can replace you where you stood a year ago. It is vain to pretend that you believe in a welcome which does not exist; but I do wrong to speak now: to-morrow I shall be ready to explain to you all the arrangements which are necessary after your return."

"Arrangements! What the deuce do you mean, Nelly? I 've come home to make it all right," said Sir Philip.

"To-morrow," said my lady, who trembled with agitation.

She did not leave him till her sons had first left the room, and were out of harm's way; but she said nothing more to the sullen penitent, who went off at length to eat his supper, his wrath exploding on his attendant by the way. Then my lady went up-stairs; she met Hugh at the door of her dressing-room, where he was waiting to say a word of excuse—of shame—for himself, before he went to rest: his mother leaned upon his shoulder heavily, almost as if she would fall. "Oh, Hugh! my only comfort!" said my lady; and then there dawned upon the young man all her fears for his encounter with his father, and how she had found comfort in the weakness which had overpowered him with shame. Poor Hugh was overcome; he suffered his mother to return to his own room with him, to close the door upon him, to assure herself that he would not go down-stairs again, but would go to sleep—without any of his

usual impatience. He was humbled to see how, in the midst of her trouble, her fears for him had aggravated all; and said his prayers with tears in his eyes, when she had left him, finding comfort, somehow, in the old bare straightforward simplicity of a child's appeal to God,—for Hugh's doubts were only temper-deep, and had made no footing in his heart. And when my lady entered her own room at last, and closed behind her that door which shut out the weary world and its cares, she found Evelyn seated on a footstool, with her head against an easy-chair, fallen asleep. My lady did not realize how late it was, nor how long a time had elapsed since she sent Evelyn away, till she found out how this tender little peacemaker, sent away from the scene of trouble, had prayed and wept herself to sleep. My lady knelt down beside her child, and prayed, too, and wept. Oh! it was hard, very hard! but when her heart was relieved, she woke Evelyn and put her to bed tenderly, as mothers only can, bending over her many a time during the night long—those slow winter hours, which brought little slumber to herself—to listen thankfully to the low sweet breath which told how Evelyn had forgot all *her* share of the common sorrow, in the sleep of youth.

When Sir Philip went to *his* room to find it bare and solitary—not so much as a pin-cushion to be found—not a vestige to make it visible that presence of womankind had ever been there—the unfortunate baronet was much dismayed. He opened the great wardrobe where some of his wife's dresses once hung, and found it bare, gaunt, and empty—an uninhabited desert: he wandered, with his candle in his hand, through the dreary waste of that great apartment. It was cheerful enough to look at; there was a bright fire, and the candles were lighted on the mantelpiece; nevertheless, Sir Philip searched about, with his candlestick in his hand. What was he looking for? In the first place, for any token whatever that his wife had been there, or meant to be, of which there was not the slightest; in reality, with but a dim and blind perception for what he had lost, for the love and the life inestimable, which he could never, never, in all his existence, find again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The first person who came down-stairs on the morning after that agitating night, was Rothes. The boy came softly into

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the breakfast-room, while the servants were still arranging it, a full hour before any one usually appeared: he seemed half disappointed as he went up-stairs again, after a hurried peep into the library. When he returned to his own room, he left the door a little a-jar, and placed himself close by it, listening anxiously. Rothes was of a more practical mind than Hugh; months ago he had made secret preparations for this emergency, and now he lurked within his half-opened door, ready to waylay my lady, to offer her, not any heroic championship, but the support of his steady boyish good sense, and of the information he had laboriously acquired. But Rothes could not understand why his mother should be so long of stirring this morning, of all the mornings in the year; and, tired of waiting, went at last to her door, to see if anything was wrong. My lady was dressed and ready, but seated in a chair by the window, doing nothing. It was still not much over eight o'clock,—not very bright daylight. She was gazing over the misty country, the fields white with hoar-frost, the bare trees, and the dull line of wintry sea in the distance, without seeing them, fully occupied with her own thoughts. She motioned Rothes to come in when she saw him, and he came to her side, and stood there silently, also looking out and perceiving nothing. Somehow, a window is a consolation to a full heart. "Mother," said Rothes, after a long pause, "the law is not so hard as it seems."

"It is very hard," said my lady; "you don't know—it is impossible you can know—it is very hard: I have no hope from the law."

"I do know," said Rothes with a little eagerness; "six months ago—it was no use bothering you telling you—but I read up. Then there's one of our fellows has a brother going in for the bar; I borrowed no end of books from him, and I do know: and the law is not so hard as it seems."

"How then, Rothes?" said my lady smiling faintly. She smiled, not because she found comfort in the assurance, but in tender gratitude to her boy. She put her hand within his arm, and looked up to him, with the smile fading from her grave face; thinking, as she drew him close to her, with a sudden pang, how soon they might be almost strangers to each other.

"If we can but get a proper man," said Rothes, bending an anxious practical gaze upon his mother: "clever ones know how to do it. The harder the law is, the more ways there are of eluding it, if you only get a proper man."

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"How do you know this, Rothes?" said my lady.

"Partly because it's common sense, partly because it's necessity—and you can find it out from the books," said Rothes; "why, mother, that's law!—that's what the fellows do. If everything was straightforward and arbitrary, there would be no need for lawyers; it's because there's ever so many crooked bits and byways and holes to escape out of, that fellows live by it. I'm going in for honours, mother, when I go to Oxford; and then, if you'll stand by me, I mean to go in for the bar."

"My boy, your father must decide that," said my lady with a sigh.

The dark red glow came once more over the lad's face. "I'm to take orders," he said, with that tone of involuntary scorn with which a strong mind, unawares to itself, perceives the inconsistencies of a weak one. "Should you think my father would like a son of his to be a parson? Never mind, mother; I'll do what's right; but that's not what we were talking of. You'll find it far easier than it seems, if we do but get the proper man."

"Rothes," said my lady, colouring deeply, "don't you think the newspapers and the public know quite enough already about our family? You would not like to hear your mother's name in everybody's mouth as your father's has unfortunately been. This very election, Rothes, which I daresay has brought Sir Philip home—suppose how I should feel if your father, when he went to his constituency, found your mother's proceedings against him made part of an opposition cry; you are old enough to know how they do at elections. Rothes, I think I should die of shame!"

"But there is no election, mother," said Rothes eagerly.

"There is sure to be; he will be forced to resign, or else he will be shamed. I have heard from your grandmamma, and she will advise him to do so," said my lady; "but my mind was made up long before I thought of that. I must make an agreement with your father, Rothes; I must not go to law."

"It's illegal!" cried Rothes with vehemence.

"Never mind; I am not afraid of the law," said my lady once more with a smile: "your father will not refuse me what I ask; he will not break the contract when it is made. But, Rothes," added the mother slowly, looking in his face with earnestness, "we shall all have to deny ourselves: I cannot

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hope to take more than Evelyn and Edie, or perhaps Harry, with me when I go away."

The boy's lip quivered. "I remember, mother," he said in a tone which might have seemed sullen to any one who did not know Rothes Umphraville,—"I remember what you said when we heard it first: don't fear for me; I'll do whatever you say." My lady kissed her boy gratefully, with tears in her eyes. Rothes was glad to go away, glad to discharge himself, unseen, of the secret wrath which his strong self-control never permitted to be visible to other sight but his own; but it was just as much as Rothes could bear, to think of the house without my lady—without Evelyn—whom this strong fellow, who tyrannized over her, loved dearly in his heart,—without little mischievous Edie, whose laugh always seemed to ring in his ear at school when he thought of home.

"Poor Evie! how she trembled when he kissed her," cried Rothes to himself, in a sudden accession of rage and tenderness; and, as nobody saw him, perhaps the boy shed, out of the bitterness of his heart, half-a-dozen burning tears. While my lady, rising up slowly to go down-stairs, paused to cast a weary wistful look from her window: she gazed at it as if this were the last time she should ever see that familiar landscape; perhaps she never realized before how much it had grown a part of herself, a part of her home. The soft slopes of the Downs, crusted with hoar-frost; the low fields and villages beyond—for another village spire was in the view, beside the little Norman Tower nestled among its trees at Broadmead; the distant dusky line of the sea, with a snarl of white foam upon the wintry beach. She kept looking at it with wearied eyes,—eyes which had seen it often, without seeing it—which were familiar with every bit of road, almost every tree,—tired eyes, which had watched almost all the night, which had not wept half enough to relieve themselves, nor could weep. My lady sighed heavily as she turned away from the window: she had made her farewell. Sir Philip did not come down to breakfast, which was a great relief to everybody. Evelyn was extremely pale, full of sudden trembles, frightened, troubled, not able to speak above her breath. As for Hugh, he was greatly subdued, though not so ashamed as last night: he took his place close by his mother, anxious to know what she was about to do. Harry and Edie would have been very troublesome but for Rothes, who made shift to occupy them without saying anything about it. Edie was eager to know about

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papa—why nobody woke her up last night,—why he did not come into her room to see her,—why she might not go to him now; while Harry, a little more enlightened, tried hard to look mysterious and preoccupied, after the model of Hugh, and tantalized his younger sister's curiosity by a great many hushes and assurances that she knew nothing about it. Rothes took the charge of them with great self-denial: true, he snubbed Harry *con amore*, with some pleasure in the duty; but it was not so easy to satisfy Edith, who insisted upon making appeals to mamma. "My lady is going somewhere," said Rothes; "if you make a row she'll leave you at home. Do you hear, Edie? my lady's busy making it up, and if you say a single word you shall not go."

"Oh, yes! I am sure! it's very likely!" said Edie, scornfully: "do you think I believe mamma's going anywhere when papa's come home?" My lady heard and answered in her own person, to the extreme bewilderment of the little girl. "Yes, Edie; do not say anything about it; you shall hear presently: I *am* going somewhere, and perhaps to-day."

"My lady's going to leave papa," whispered Harry; "everybody knows." Edie started from her chair and ran to her mother.

"Oh, you wicked boy!" cried the little girl. "Mamma, do you hear what he says? Oh, mamma! are you really, really going away? and is papa not going too?"

This appeal was just as much as my lady's composure could bear; for it was not possible to explain the reason to a child. "Yes, Edie," she said, sadly; "you must know, and you must not say anything about it; I am really, really going away, to leave papa, to leave Heathcote: I cannot help it, Edie. Now, dear child, don't grieve me; sit quiet, and don't say anything, for I have a great deal to think of before I go away."

"And, mamma," said Edie, with desperate resolution keeping herself from crying, though two big tears fell from her eyes, and she had to swallow down the gasp in her throat; "mamma, what are *we* to do?" The child looked round upon them all, counting them: it was a hard moment for the composure of the elder ones, and Evelyn laid her head upon Hugh's shoulder, and, less strong than her little sister, sobbed aloud. "You are going with me—you and Evelyn," said my lady with quivering lips; she looked at her two boys on either side of her, both of whom were painfully restraining themselves.

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"Mamma! and me," cried Harry loudly, pressing forward to secure himself.

Hugh and Rothes looked at each other, saying nothing; but Hugh rose up—some expression was needful of the burning excitement within him—he stood up, started up, to save himself speaking words which he dared not say; and Evelyn sobbed aloud; while little Edie, whom my lady had kissed, went back to her seat, drawing Harry with her. "Oh, Harry! be quiet! don't vex mamma," cried the little girl. The least little one of all had learned to command herself; perhaps the bitterest part of the struggle was already past.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Sir Philip was already in the library; he had breakfasted in his own room, and afterwards had betaken himself to this apartment, meaning to try what a preliminary sulk would do for the establishment of better relations with his family: but he could not help listening and watching as he sat by himself within those familiar walls. He fancied he could hear them whispering, conspiring how to make him uncomfortable. He supposed my lady meant to punish him by retaliation, for the vexation he had subjected her to, and went on solacing himself with the idea of all this being a mere quarrel, and fit of jealousy and petulance, in which the children abetted their mother, but which he might soon hope to conquer; for though Sir Philip felt tolerably well convinced that he had been a "d——d fool," he had no suspicion that he was a man dishonoured, or one whom his wife and children would blush to acknowledge. It was the other husband, he whose home Sir Philip had invaded, who was the dishonoured person. Thus, at least, thought the master of Heathcote, and so said the world. But when my lady came into the library, Sir Philip was startled. She was dressed very richly and solemnly, with a special state about her appearance, which did not fail to impress his imagination; the heavy magnificent folds of her velvet gown somehow enhanced the gravity of her countenance. He felt a momentary persuasion that this was not quite a quarrel, or the reprisals of jealousy, but something more serious: he rose half from his chair, and then sank

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down again. It was difficult to know what to do—whether to carry out the sulk he intended, or to address her: a little rising anxiety prompted the last course, after a moment. He spoke with petulance and displeasure, like a man ill-used. "Well, Nelly! I hope you come to make some explanation of the way you have used me since I came home?"

"Yes," said my lady. She seated herself at the other end of the table, with that between them, and paused, that she might have the more composure. "Yes; I wish to explain everything, and I trust you will hear me as patiently as you can."

"Surely, Nelly! surely: *I* won't be hard upon you," said Sir Philip, brightening up a little.

My lady looked at him with astonishment; his expectations and her purpose seemed so strangely unlike. "I am afraid you don't understand me," she said. "Do you think it possible, after all that has happened, that we should ever be able to resume our old life again?"

"Well, Nelly, I confess you have me there," said Sir Philip, hanging his head a little. "I've behaved very badly, I confess; I've made a d——d fool of myself; I don't deserve such a good wife as you have always been: but when a man comes home, he shows he's found out his folly. I'm ready to stand anything in reason that you choose to say. You've got the best of it, I don't deny: but when a man comes back to you again, and says he's sorry, what can he do more? You ought to let by-gones be by-gones, and have done with the whole affair. *I* am glad enough to be done with it, I can tell you: what with one thing and another, I never spent such a miserable year."

"It is scarcely a subject to speak to me about," cried my lady, with a blush of indignation; "but, Sir Philip, you mistake me entirely, if you think I am going to say anything to you of what is past; it is not for me to enter on such a subject; it does not matter now. All that I have to do is to tell you that we cannot live under the same roof, nor share the same life again, and that, to prevent scandal—to keep our unfortunate name from further publicity—I expect you to join me in a peaceable arrangement: that is all I have to say."

"All, Nelly! What the deuce do you mean?" cried Sir Philip. "You speak like a fool, and you know you do. Cannot live under the same roof! Why, you're only a woman! you're my wife! you belong to me! you couldn't

divorce me, if there had been twenty such instead of only one! Come, come, let us be sensible: I know this is only a bit of bravado, and you've a right to your temper, I confess you have; but you ought to think of a man's temptations. Every woman's not like you; and, upon my honour, Nelly, upon my soul, if you think I ever, even when I was most infatuated, cared a tenth part so much for her as I do for you, I swear you're wrong!"

My lady rose to her feet with a sudden cry of impatience and shame, no longer controllable. "The more shame, the more disgrace to you—the greater insult to me!" she cried almost wildly, with the violent blush of anger and humiliation. "Do you think it is any comfort to me, this that you affirm on your soul and your honour? Can you not understand—you, that have been my husband twenty years—how I could rather hope you loved her with the maddest youthful passion, than that it was a mere base, abominable impulse which took you from me to her, and brings you back from her to me? Do you think I can feel her a rival, and triumph over the idea of displacing her? What kind of person must I have seemed when you could think this of me?"

"Upon my word, Nelly," cried her husband, with an evil smile, "you are quite a Dame Eleanor: I could not have supposed you would be so jealous, upon my soul!"

My lady looked at him for a moment, with involuntary contempt. She took her seat, calmed down by the sudden change of feeling. "I am not jealous," she said, quietly. "There is a difference: I am disgusted."

Sir Philip remained silent, and made no answer. The gleam of that disdain, though it was involuntary, threw a momentary light upon his obtuse conscience. There is no satisfaction in the thought of being contemptible; neither is it comforting to know that one has produced disgust, where one thought of an irritated and jealous love, ready to receive, in a passion of reconciliation, and even of gratitude, the returning lover.

"A woman will forgive anything, if she thinks that you continue to love her," had been the advice of Sir Philip's friend, who had counselled him to be bold and return home at once. That was the judgment of a man of the world, who had no very elevated opinion of women. But Miss Latimer, who "knew woman's heart," took precisely the same view. Sir Philip had found it in most of the literature he patronized, and in the opinion of most people who "understood the subject."

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How should he have been any wiser than his neighbours? Ah! there lay the sting of it to my lady. He knew no better, was no wiser, had no other conception of a pure-minded wife and woman, though he had been *her* husband for two-and-twenty years! Women always feel this bitterly; it is a self-humiliation, exquisite in its pain. Somehow it seems as if it must be their own fault, that people have understood them so ill.

"But I don't want to be angry, nor to make you angry," said my lady. "Heaven knows there is little comfort to be had in that; everything is dismal enough without aggravation. Let us say nothing of the past, which cannot be changed; but now, Sir Philip, I beg you to understand the necessity—— I am going away."

"Folly! you daren't go away; I've a right to detain you!" said Sir Philip. "What! don't you know that the wife belongs to the husband?—that I have a right to keep you here?"

"I know," said my lady, gravely, looking at him, "that a man who has no regard for public opinion, none for his own character,—a man who does not care how vile he looks in other people's eyes,—a man who is either a villain or a fool, may do everything that is cruel to his wife; but I know this is not your case." Sir Philip gazed at her again, with startled amazement. Slowly the truth of what she said dawned upon him; slowly he began to perceive that, for a man like himself, with still some human standing-ground and claim upon the regard of others, the law, whatever it ordained, was unavailable—that, for his own sake, he dared not oppress his wife. "I know," continued my lady, with a voice so serious that it sounded almost solemn in the ears of her husband, "that though we are parted beyond the reach of recovery, still we are not old nor likely to die, nor without duties: it is for the interest of both of us to make the least misery we possibly can about our parting. They say I could ask a separation in the ecclesiastical courts; but I have taken no step for that. They say contracts are not legal between a man and a wife; but I trust in your word. I will go away from your house as I came into it, taking nothing with me but what I brought, except——." My lady paused, her voice trembled; unawares, she clasped her hands to controul the emotion with which she thought of those she would carry with her and those she would leave behind. Sir Philip thought it was a gesture of appeal: he seized immediately upon this great advantage over her. He was not a man of elevated generosity; but, to

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do him justice, it was not so much a punishment to be held over her, as a strong inducement to make her stay. "The children!" he exclaimed. "Yes, you have come to a most motherly determination; you will desert your children, because you are offended with me; or, perhaps, you meant to take them with you. Oh! there are two words to be said to that: I am their natural protector. How do I know what you would do with them? You may teach them to hate their father: not one of them shall leave me!"

"Sir Philip," said my lady, once more restored to composure by his words, "justice can't be done between us, because all that has happened is unnatural and against nature; such poor imitation of justice as we can get, I demand of you. I ask to take away my girls; I do not ask for my dear, dear boys, my pride and joy. God bless them! I don't wish to leave you desolate, however you may have sinned against me: but my girls, my women-children! You have taken from me my husband, my home, my sons, my natural life! Give me Evelyn and Edith; it is all I ask at your hands, in return for all you have taken from me!"

"No!" cried Sir Philip, rising up; "no! do you hear me? no! I won't be fooled by any woman in the world,—not by you, my lady! Go, if you choose, and welcome; but you shall not have one of my children! No! do you hear? that's what *I* have got to say."

"Stay! pause a little," said my lady, rising too; "think what you are doing. Is it certain that the proper authorities, when I apply to them, will think *you* the best person to have charge of your daughters? do you feel sure of that? as you may be sure I shall lose no time and neglect no means, to gain myself this justice. What did you come home for, Sir Philip? for your constituency, your seat in Parliament? What chance will you have, think you, if the people know that your wife has had to leave her house alone, and that you have taken advantage of every temporary possibility of cruelty to her, which the law permitted? The law is hard, but not so cruel as you think: the judges who will have to judge between us are reasonable men. I am not afraid of the issue; but *you* will not risk it, if you care anything for opinion, anything for the world. Hear me, Sir Philip: people know me; I have never done anything to you but a wife's duty: everybody knows what you have done. If you resist my natural, just, temperate claim, what will any one think of *you?*"

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Perhaps it was a poor reason; but my lady dared not throw her heart into the question; dared not declare with passion the horrible injustice which he could inflict upon her if he tried; dared not do one of those things most natural, yet most unwise, with which women—wounded to the heart, deeply resentful of the sin that wrongs and the law that will not do them justice—defeat their own cause. She kept herself calm, though her pulse beat like that of a person in a fever; she restrained herself in word, in gesture, even in look; when the strong tide of natural emotion swelled round her, almost overpowering her self-control, she held fast by the thought of her children as a drowning man would do by a rope: for their sake no further scandal; for their sake, such peace as could be saved out of the wreck. She stood pale, with her heart beating loud, and something tingling in her ears, seeing everything in a mist except her husband opposite to her, who had thrown himself into his chair, and, leaning on the table, sat staring up at her. He was conquered by that unanswerable argument,—what would anybody, what would everybody say of him, an unfaithful husband, yet a domestic tyrant?—a man shunned by every man he knew. He had not courage enough, even in a good cause, to have faced universal scorn: he gave way entirely under the dread of it now. Presently they went into details, and decided everything. My lady knew she had no law to secure their mutual agreement, so she chose to put it on his honour, which the law could not restore if he sacrificed it. She laid her plans before him calmly; she had even selected the place where she would live in her widowhood, a place only half-a-dozen miles away; her sons were to visit her, and her daughters were to see their father when he pleased.

"There need not be any enmity nor appearance of it," said my lady, sadly; "you and I are parted for ever, but our children belong to both of us; and why should we try to wrong each other of what is dearest to us both?"

"Then you *will* leave me, Eleanor?" cried Sir Philip; "you won't stay? Do you think I ever meant this, ever thought of this? Oh! hang it all! did I ever *intend* to leave you, except for a time?"

"Hush! this is enough," cried my lady, her face once more covered with the crimson flush of indignation; "don't let me go away in resentment: farewell!" But he would not take her hand; he got up in a renewed access of passion, to swagger about the room, exclaiming what he would do. While he was

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thus engaged, she left him; and, hastening back to her own room, closed and locked the door, and, falling down on her knees, fell into such a passion of sobbing and hysterical agony as no one had ever seen in my lady—no one saw it now but God!

CHAPTER XXIX.

My lady did not leave her apartment for several hours: when she did so she was dressed for a journey, and behind in that dressing-room, of which the door now stood wide open, there remained, except for the trunks which stood locked and corded by the wall, a chill rigor of good order and holiday arrangement, enough to strike dismay into a household. Her maid, also cloaked and bonneted, followed her out of the room, and the carriage had already been ordered to take them away. When my lady went down-stairs, she found her boys waiting for her in the breakfast room; she went in by herself and closed the door. Harry was very sulky; he thought it a horrid shame that Evelyn and Edie should be taken away on this sudden exciting delightful journey, while he was left all by himself at home: he scarcely deigned to look at his mother when she entered,—instead he turned his back upon the door, bent over the fire, and began to toss little pellets of paper into the flames. Hugh was walking about the room in great excitement, which the youth honestly did all he could to subdue, but which burned in his cheeks, and echoed in his step, against his will; while Rothes sat by the table, leaning his head on his hands, looking heavy but resolute, ready to undertake anything which might be laid upon him. My lady entered, but not with a heavy step or a tearful eye: she came up to Hugh affectionately, and took hold of his arm. She did not mean to weaken them by a pathetic farewell; on the contrary, she had to stimulate their courage. "I am going away, Hugh," she said. "You know why, and you know the urgent reason, for my sake, that you should show yourselves patient and forbearing. Very soon you will have to go back to Oxford: it is but a short trial; but no temper, no passion, no strife, Hugh, I beseech you, for your mother's sake!"

Hugh drew his arm out of my lady's hold. "Mother, don't speak to me; it is more than I can bear," he cried, with the sharpness of great agitation in his voice.

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My lady did not insist, nor press her remonstrance upon him. "And as for you, my boy Rothes," she said, with a tone of trust in her voice, which brought tears unseen, unshed, and unacknowledged, to the deep eyes of this young stoic; "as for you, I know you remember all that is at stake. You, too, will go back to school presently; take care of Harry—he is the worst off, poor boy." Harry heard this by the fire, and moved about uneasily in his seat, touched a little, yet prepared to be horribly indignant if my lady went away without speaking to him; but, even while he was thinking of this, his mother came up to him, laid her hand upon his head, and drew him towards her, without a thought of his boyish displeasure. "My poor Harry!" said my lady; "you will miss us most, poor boy; but you must try to be brave, dear child, for a time, and be dutiful to your father. Perhaps, by-and-by, Sir Philip may let you come to me; at all events, after a week or two, you will be able to come to see us, my poor boy! I don't mind going away from Hugh and Rothes, half so much, Harry, as from you."

"Don't you, mamma?" cried the boy. He was astonished and overpowered; he wanted to cry very much, but would not for the world. The whole man swelled within him in answer to this touch; he wanted to confess his sulks on the moment, and call himself a brute,—that would have been some consolation to Harry.

"No," said my lady; "they are older than you—they don't want me so much; but Harry, you will try to be a man, and do right, will you not? that I may feel happy about you? Do everything you are used to do, just as if I were at home; and remember, I think of my boy and pray for him every day: will you, Harry? May I trust you when I go away?"

"Yes, mamma!" cried the boy. "Yes, everything; I'll never forget a word that you ever said,—trust me, mamma! I'm not a child. I'll do everything for your sake."

And my lady bent down her head for a long time over him as she kissed Harry. He saw the tears which the others were not to see; and more and more, at this confidence which she placed in him, the heart swelled in the boy's breast. For the moment, he had seen into his mother's heart. Then she held out her hands to Hugh, who bent down his head upon them, exclaiming aloud that she must not go alone; that he was not a child to be under his father's rule; that he was her eldest son, and had a right to protect his mother;—amid all which

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outcry, passionate and vehement, my lady had hard enough ado to preserve her own composure. Rothes suddenly came to her assistance. "Look here, Hugh," cried Rothes; "nobody can harm my lady: do you hear me? Don't you know she's as sure of honour and respect, as if—as if she were an angel!" cried the boy, with a sob which he could not contain. "We've got to live here and be quiet; that's all we can do for her. Mother, I'm ready,—say good-bye: *I* know none of us will fail you: say good-bye to us all." Which she did, embraced by their young arms, yielding her own self-command to their young excitement. "God bless my boys!" said my lady: and when Hugh, who had been worst of all, saw how her eyes glittered with tears, his manhood moved him with sudden shame.

"Rothes was right, mother; but don't fear for me," said Hugh. "Now come, this is my right, at least," and he drew her arm within his, and led her away.

In the hall, Evelyn and Edie stood ready;—they had been taking leave of their father; and several of the servants stood, wistful and anxious, in the hall. "They all send their duty, and may they come to see you go, my lady?" said the old butler, who spoke and stepped about as though he were assisting at a funeral.

"No, no, Ormond; let no notice be taken; let everything go on as usual," said my lady.

Then Hugh put her tenderly into the carriage, placing shawls round her, as if taking cold was her chief danger. Then Evelyn followed, speechless with weeping. "Good-bye," whispered Edie to Harry; "shouldn't you like to be me? and papa's in such a temper! oh! so amiable; and you'll all catch it when we're gone. Yes, mamma, I'm coming! Good-bye!" Whereupon Edith sprang into the lap of my lady's maid, and the carriage drove away. They were gone! The household stood gazing after them, scarcely believing it possible. Women-servants were stealing up from the kitchen, sobbing and wiping their eyes. Harry ran after them, keeping up with the carriage half-way to Broadmead, and bringing back with him the consolation that his mother's last look was at himself; while Hugh and Rothes turned away together in the opposite direction, without saying a word to each other. While the family dispersed, the servants remained; they could not tell what to make of it, or what might come next, as they stood straining their eyes after my lady, the women huddled together, afraid

and crying, most of them. Ormond stood in advance, very solemn, still like a mute at a funeral, shading his old eyes with his hand. "What do you all mean, a-idling and a-staring here?" cried the butler; "don't you know my lady's last words was, that dinner should be ready all the same?" Ignoble every-day necessity! Alas! what is there in the world which can displace this mightiest of modern institutions, —the dinner which has always to be ready all the same? My lady had to order it when she arrived at the Brighton hotel, which was the end of their journey, Edie being undeniably and demonstratively hungry; and even Evelyn, whose tears were dried, feeling no remarkable disinclination to the meal, which would be her first meal to-day, poor girl! The change, the novelty, the rapid motion, and the gay gleam of the Brighton streets, did something for them all; even my lady, after all the agitation she had passed through, felt a sensible relief. She had lived for months under a constant pressure of anxiety, fearing yet expecting her husband's return, and the parting that must ensue: now, that pain, painful as it was, was at least over. A sense of fatigue and of repose stole into her wearied mind: the worst was past, and now there might be some hope of rest. She had come away suddenly, because it was best so; because there could be no good in remaining even a night longer, but only further vexation; and because the ghost of a legal danger had also crossed her mind. Under all circumstances, it was safest that no one could say she had lingered longer than was needful; and now my lady was thankful to find it all over,—thankful to feel herself so tired and worn out, that she could expect to rest.

CHAPTER XXX.

In the meantime, something happened to Hugh. My lady had been gone three or four days. Sir Philip had descended out of his sulks and ferocious temper, to see how the boys would behave. The boys behaved beautifully: there certainly was little conversation, small cheerfulness, no great demonstration of affection; but they were all perfectly quiet, dutiful, respectful to their father, ready to tell him anything he wanted, and to receive his suggestions with deference. It was not so hard to do this, as they had expected; for constantly, when they were disposed to be most resentful, some familiar look or

word, some careless reference to common things, disarmed them in a moment. He was their father; nothing could take away his natural rights, his natural standing; and perhaps even my lady would have been startled had she known how easily again they fell into the common ways of life at home. Yet there was a sore, sore, woeful difference in the house; which nobody, however, felt so much as Sir Philip. He had never been a vicious man until this last year; but he was born a sensualist. But for circumstances, he might have lived and died one of those amiable sensualists, who, when they have the luck, marry three or four wives; and, when they have not, are very faithful and very fond to the one with whom they must content themselves—men who have a pleasure in the sight and sound of a woman by them, who like to touch soft hands and see fair forms, and indulge, without sin, an amiable voluptuousness. All possibility of this was over for the unfortunate baronet. After his passion was past, he felt unspeakably dreary with only the boys to bear him company. If any of his neighbours had been likely to be cordial, Sir Philip would gladly have loitered about anybody's drawing-room; as that was not the case, he felt very much tempted to seek refuge even among the servants, and began to feel, helplessly, that he should be drawn into evil courses. What could he do? and why the deuce, if she wanted to make a reformed man of him, did Nelly go away? So, under present circumstances, father and sons agreed in spending as much time as possible out-of-doors; and it was thus that the following encounter happened to Hugh. He was walking fast along the hilly road where it descended upon the low country beyond Broadmead, in the direction of Westhampton. Six miles off, beyond Westhampton, concealed by trees on every side but that which fronted the sea, and placed high on the summit of one of those "cliffs," at whose pretensions people from rocky countries smile, stood Westwood, the house which my lady had fixed on for her future abode. Hugh had been seeing it, and was returning at a very rapid rate, partly because the evening was cold, partly because his thoughts went fast, and he had to press on to keep up with them. He had got almost within sight of the trees of Heathcote, when some one called to him, and he looked round, amazed to see the rector, on his ungracious pony, making his way slowly along the darkening path, looking frosty, anxious, hungry, and cold,—as was natural, considering how late the hour was, and how impossible the

good man must have perceived it to be that he could get home in time for the dinner, which should smoke on the rectory board in less than half an hour. "Here, Hugh! that is an excellent lad!—seize pony's reigns, will you, and walk beside me?" said the rector. "I am rejoiced to meet you: indeed I came this road on purpose; but pony is so stubborn, that I have missed my way."

"I hope nothing wrong has happened?" said Hugh, good-humouredly, conducting "pony," who in Mr. Hardwick's possession never bore another name.

"No, no! I can't say precisely *wrong;* but I have something to say to you, my dear boy,—something really so important, so delicate, that—that I really don't know how to begin," said the rector. "I meant to come and speak to my lady; but, bless my heart! Hugh; they tell me my lady's gone away."

"Yes," said Hugh.

"No doubt no one could blame her, if she saw her way," said the rector, with his perplexed look; "but I am grieved she's gone, for all your sakes. I'd rather not see Sir Philip, Hugh,—not to-night: no, thank you, I'll make my way home; but just walk by pony's side, there's an excellent youth; I *have* something to say to *you*."

"Well, Mr. Hardwick?" said Hugh, as nothing followed.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick! it is easy to say that," said the unfortunate rector querulously; "a clergyman has very hard duties, Hugh; and often his interference, though with the purest motives, is reckoned impertinence. I trust it may not be so in the present case; I trust I may not find it so."

"If you have any fear, don't say it," cried Hugh, with the natural haste of his impetuous temper: "I should be grieved to say anything which could vex you; but I can bear no interference in our family affairs."

"Hush! it's not that," said the perplexed rector; "it's your own affairs, Hugh, my dear boy. They tell me you're—you're—eh?—in love! I heard so: is it true?"

Hugh laughed and blushed, yet was slightly angry. "I trust you have no objection," he said; but the rector's interference on this point was rather amusing, after all.

"There's an anecdote of a duke,—I forget who it was," said Mr. Hardwick,—"who gave his heir a list of all the families in England that had hereditary diseases of body or mind in them, and told him to marry wherever he pleased,

except there: he was a sensible man. Hugh, they tell me your choice is excellent, except——"

"Who tells you?" said Hugh, grasping the pony's rein with a force which frightened that pugnacious brute, and made him snort and turn round, to the detriment of the rector. Mr. Hardwick looked rather confused, and did not care to answer immediately.

"I really can't tell; everybody speaks of these things," said the rector; "but if it's true, Hugh, let me give you a warning. Very affectionately, my dear boy; you're one of my flock; I've a right to speak. Do you know that the young lady's family are called crazy? do you know——"

"I know that I'll pitch into the sea any man of my own years who dares to whisper such a lie!" cried Hugh, with a burst of passion.

The rector made an effort to draw "pony's" rein from the young man's hand. "That is a very improper way to speak to a clergyman," said Mr. Hardwick in his peremptory tone; "but it does not sway me from my duty: I have known you all your life, Hugh Umphraville. When my lady was young, she once paid me the compliment to say that she had found great comfort in my ministrations. I have an interest in the family which is quite beyond any petulance from a youth like you. But your mother has left you, and your father has unfortunately diminished his own influence; I don't know who you have to give you a word of good advice, except your clergyman; and I mean to do my duty, whatever you may choose to say."

"Thank you. I beg your pardon, Mr. Hardwick: certainly any threat from me to you would be eminently ridiculous," said Hugh, half ashamed of himself, yet still very angry; "but this is a matter quite out of your range, and, if you wish to retain your influence, you must give it up at once."

"You have no right, sir, to speak so to your clergyman!" repeated Mr. Hardwick, in great displeasure.

"Very possibly," said Hugh; "and neither have you any right to interfere with a man's heart and dearest interests, or to breathe a word to the disparagement, if that were possible, of one who has no equal in the world!"

"Ah! Hugh, my dear boy!" cried the rector, melted by the young lover's sudden exclamation, "do you think I don't know? Who is it that blight falls first upon? isn't it the fairest and the dearest, those that seem nearest to the angels?

Ah! Hugh, I'm an old fellow,—you don't think of it; but I was once young like you."

Now it is certain that, though this excellent man's heart was really moved, and though his story might possibly have turned out quite a pathetic one, Hugh, in the happy impertinence of his youth, could do nothing but smile at the idea of the middle-aged rector, on that disagreeable pony, having been once a cavalier like himself, young, high-spirited, and in love. It was very cruel, for the good clergyman's mouth was opened, and he was perfectly ready to have confided to the youth *his* experience of the universal troubles; but Hugh, with the most profane sudden impulse to laughter, directed the conversation suddenly into another channel. He went on, leading the pony at a faster pace, down towards Broadmead. Perhaps even yet Mr. Hardwick might be in time for dinner; and as they proceeded, the wind began to whistle in the trees, so that they could not hear each other speak, which the good rector sincerely regretted. "Another time, my dear boy—I must speak of this again," he shouted above the wind before they parted: "now leave pony's head; she'll go fast enough now she's near home. Good night, Hugh, and think on what I have said." With which parting words, pony shot away into the darkness, snuffing the air and carrying off the puzzled rector, while Hugh turned to go home alone. As he went on, the idea of this interference returned to him with renewed anger. Who had told Mr. Hardwick? Was he to hear any more of the crazy family from which his Susan came? and Hugh struck down the weeds on the roadside, with an amiable impulse of knocking down the more intrusive human people who ventured to interpose their vain words between him and his betrothed. Then it occurred to him that he had not told his father; yet now at last it was inevitable that Sir Philip should know. Hugh's heart revolted at the thought of discussing Susan with his father: he did not like to hear Sir Philip mention the name of any woman,—and Susan! But Hugh tried to feel as reasonable as he could, and went home thinking how he could introduce the subject, and what, or rather how little, he could say. Dinner was always rather a difficult affair. To keep up the form solemnly at the half-vacant table, where somehow the absence of my lady and Evelyn counted for a great deal more than the two empty chairs, where the lights seemed dimmer, where the servants moved about behind with a formality which was no longer quiet good order, and where

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everything felt chilly and uncomfortable, was no easy matter for Hugh and Rothes. Conversation seemed so forced and unnatural which was got up under these circumstances, and Sir Philip devoted himself so entirely to the dishes set before him—fare which, for the first day or two, his sons could scarcely eat—that such poor appearance of family talk as there was had to be done by the two youths, who found it very hard and difficult. Then Sir Philip began to fall into the habit of sitting long after dinner, and taking a good deal of wine. Hugh had come in fully prepared to make his explanation at once, and get it over; but there seemed a good many difficulties in the way, and the young man, indeed, did not know how to propose a private interview with his father. Much to his surprise, however, he was freed from the necessity. Sir Philip, who had looked rather embarrassed during the whole time of dinner, had Hugh been sufficiently disengaged himself to notice it, was disposed to be more than usually gracious after the servants left the room. He spoke of going to Hustings, of wishing them to accompany him; and then with a little abruptness, put a sudden question to his eldest son.

"By-the-bye, time goes apace; Hugh, when do you come of age?"

The young man's heart expanded with an impulse of pride and self-congratulation. "In May, sir," he said, seriously enough; and Sir Philip, who was thinking of his own selfish concerns, knew nothing of the high-swelling tide of hopes and plans of which that epoch should open the flood-gates. As he thought of it, Hugh's foot seemed to spurn all the ignoble contractions of his present life,—it was freedom, happiness, mastery over the world and every evil influence—so at least it seemed to Hugh.

"Ah! in May?" said Sir Philip; and he grew rather red, and showed considerable uneasiness, though only Rothes, and not Hugh, observed his father. "In May? Step into the library, my boy; I have something to say to you," continued the baronet, looking very uncomfortable. Hugh started with surprise. He, too, grew red with a fiery, passionate blush; he thought some one had informed Sir Philip of that fantastic obstacle between himself and Susan, which foolish people magnified. He rose, proud and stately in his young defiance, ready to declare the unchangeable fervour of his love, a thing too sacred for common discussion. Rothes, looking at them both with his keen observation, saw that his brother was mis-

taken; but even Rothes had no clue to Sir Philip's meaning: he sat looking after them as they left the room, wondering, with more than a boy's gravity, what would become of the family thus rent asunder; thinking of his mother where she was now, and, with an eager longing, leaping forward to that climax which Hugh had nearly reached, that time of boundless liberty and self-direction, when he too should be of age.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Sir Philip led the way into the library. The library was the least wretched room in the house now-a-days, for it was the one least connected with my lady. Sir Philip took his usual chair, and pointed Hugh to one beside him: then he got up, to see that the door was properly closed. "No good in letting the servants know any more than we can help," said Sir Philip; "hang the press and all our ridiculous liberty! A man in our class can't slip his foot, but every groom must know of it: that's what they call freedom of discussion in our days!" But, after this little effusion, Sir Philip made a long pause, and looked as uncomfortable as could be; then he concluded in a burst, as if to a chain of self-argument.

"The fact is, Hugh, I want your assistance; I want to raise a sum of money: a man doesn't like to speak of those matters, especially——You understand me? Well, never mind; it don't matter whether you do or not. The short and the long of it is, that I've got to pay that money,—these damages; monstrous, considering the circumstances,—and I don't know where to lay my hand on a quarter of it, unless you'll stand by me and lend me your assistance. I'm not speaking as a father to a son, Hugh; no authority, my boy; none of that sort of thing: I'm talking to you as one man talks to another, and I want you to lend me a hand." When Hugh understood his father, the young man turned his face aside for a moment with a shame, which burned and tingled in his cheeks as though they would burst. Then he drew himself up unconsciously, and set his teeth: it was a strange call for a father to make upon a son. All this time the baronet was very uneasy; he took up a pen and doubled it together till it cracked; he tore up slips of paper, and rolled them into pellets: he did not look at Hugh, though he could see very well what feelings overpowered him. Sir Philip was ashamed; but, more than

ashamed, he was anxious, thinking of the money, of how he would look, if he could not pay it, and how terribly embarrassed he should be, if Hugh refused. It was a debt of honour in its way. Sir Philip felt that there would be a little triumph in discharging it, paying for his whistle, clearing scores with the world and the law and his rival, by the *éclat* of monstrous damages. But if Hugh hesitated, if Hugh refused, the gallant baronet was aware that he would make a very poor figure: so he was rather anxious, as he rolled the paper in his fingers and looked over to his son.

"Certainly, let it be done at once, whatever has to be done: let me know what you wish," cried Hugh, growing pale and stern with the thought, which somehow made him look older than his father; "it is hard that you should have to speak on such a subject to my mother's son."

"Why, yes, it 's a confounded bore," said Sir Philip; "I can tell you, my boy—you don't like it—but I like it a long way worse. Many a father would have cut off his head sooner; many a fellow would go off and burden the estate with mortgages: as for me, I like everything honest and above-board. It 's a deuced bore, throwing away all this money for a good-for-nothing——. D'ye think I don't know that? But you may just as well preach to a set of young fellows, over-night, of the headache they 'll have in the morning. I can't help it now: there it is; must be done, or I can never hold up my head again: so I thought it the best thing, as you 'll be of age so soon, to speak to you."

"Sir Philip," said Hugh; "I can't sympathise with you; it 's not in nature. Say, in as few words as possible, what you want me to do, and I'll do it; but don't, for shame's sake, explain the cause any more."

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Sir Philip; "least said is soonest mended. The fact is just simply, that I must have the money; I haven't got it: I'm cleaned out—*I* am, every farthing,—what with travelling, what with a confounded extravagant——. And, in honour, I'm anxious to have it paid; it 's a debt of honour: a man's credit is at stake, when he does not come down with anything like that. Then it would be done with, which would be a comfort. So Hugh, my boy—I daresay I can get some one to lend it me till then—I want you to join with me in breaking the entail as soon as you are of age. The fee-simple of Brakehurst Farm would clear it all."

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"Brakehurst Farm! the oldest portion of the estate!" said Hugh.

"Hang the oldest portion of the estate! I want ready money: it's a nice little slice of land, and won't interfere with anything," cried Sir Philip. "I'm a practical man, Hugh; I don't want to make a gap in your lands, my boy. Brakehurst lies by itself, all handy; you'd never miss it out of the estate; and I think it much better to make a clear sacrifice, once for all, and be done with it, than to burden you with a mortgage which it would take the best part of your life to pay—eh, Hugh?"

"I say again, sir, let it be done at once,—instantly, if that is possible; but I can't consent either to discuss the affair with you, or to receive it as a matter of consideration for myself," said Hugh doggedly.

"Which means, I presume, that you'll make it as disagreeable to me as possible," said Sir Philip. "Oh! you're in my lady's interests, are you, and think you're standing up for her? Have a care, my boy; and just remember, please, that any moment I like, I can bring back my lady,—bring her back, and take the girls from her, by Jove! And I've a great mind to do it, if you don't all behave the humbler. By heaven, a pretty set you are, all of you, to dictate to me!"

Hugh had risen up, afraid of the headlong rage of his own passion. Sir Philip had very nearly made an end of the sanctity of his natural rights. "Another word," cried the young man, hoarse with the unnatural fury which he could scarcely restrain, "Another word, and, instead of helping you, I leave Heathcote, never to enter its doors again!".

This would not have suited Sir Philip. "Pho!" he said, striking his son familiarly on the arm; "sit down and be calm: do you think I 'm going to quarrel with *you?*"

Hugh drew himself back from the touch, as though it had been a sting. He was amazed at himself; involuntarily his hand clenched, his arm moved; he threw himself into a chair in an agony of secret remorse and shame. For the moment he had felt like a parricide; he was dismayed at the sudden self-revelation. Was it for him to blame another, with the heart of Cain panting against his own furious breast? As much unaware of the volcano of infuriated nature beside him, as though crime had never been in the world, and he himself were the most spotless of men, Sir Philip proceeded; proceeded quite calmly—like one who could not conceive of any revengeful or angry feelings directed against himself; as indeed he could not—but

would have beheld, with the most utter amazement and the deepest sense of parental injury, the state of Hugh's mind and thoughts at the present moment, could these have been revealed to him. "I presume, then, I have your consent? you are willing to enter into a sensible arrangement to clear me," said Sir Philip. "I'm obliged to you, Hugh; and I don't want to wound your feelings unreasonably, my boy: let it, if you like, be something else, and we'll leave you Brakehurst; it 's all the same to me."

"No!" said Hugh, drawing his breath hard; "no! my objections were fantastic; what does it matter? your arrangement is the best." And the youth bowed to his father with a haughty formality, which offended Sir Philip more than his petulance. The baronet grew red, in spite of himself, and swore a muttered oath. "Haven't I shown you the necessity?" cried Sir Philip. He could bear the angry sparks of Hugh's temper, which he had been wont to excite and laugh at when the youth was a child; but he resented hotly the forced calmness, the formal gravity, which seemed somehow a ground of superiority, and in which he supposed he could find an implied scorn of himself. "Perfectly," said Hugh, "and I perceive it. I warrant you fully, so far as I am concerned, to make arrangements without delay: Brakehurst will be well spent, if it clears you of such a debt. But now, when you have my entire acquiescence, is there not enough said?"

"Humph! there may be," said Sir Philip, grinding his teeth with suppressed anger; "are you in such haste? Sit down, sir, I have more to say."

Hugh obeyed. He found a certain refuge in his new gravity; it seemed to preserve him alike from passion and from the old familiar impulses of affection: he sat down beside his father with cold and formal politeness, waiting for what more there might be. "I meant to have taken you into my confidence," said Sir Philip: "hark ye, Hugh! I've other burdens: I'd rather, when we 're at it, go a little further to relieve myself; the bulk, of course, of any sum of ready money I might keep in my hands, must descend to you. I 'd rather go a little further when we 're at it,—eh, Hugh?"

"I represent the family, however long it may last," said the young man; "let us clear off—and forget, if we can,—this debt of which you speak; but for the rest, we have no right to impoverish the race."

"The race? Oho! that reminds me," said Sir Philip,

attempting an easier tone. "They tell me you've been doing a little private business while I've been away. Fallen in love, eh, Hugh? and that it's a pretty little girl, with a pretty little fortune, and my lady's pleased—eh? Well, my boy, I wish you joy: you've my free consent to marry as soon as you please. I've seen little Susan long ago; a nice sort of little girl. I'm glad my lady's pleased. Get married, Hugh, whenever you like, and bring her home: there's no comfort in a house if there's not a woman in it; and now your mother's gone and deserted us. Ah! you young dog, now it's your turn." As well as he could, though not without a struggle, Hugh gulped down his discontent. He blushed not the ingenuous blush of a young lover. To bring Susan here, to his father! The thought filled Hugh with a burning disgust and repugnance: it seemed almost to make his own marriage, which as yet the youth had approached tenderly, with "tender morning visions" of the bridal Paradise of Poets, a thing of pain and humiliation. He muttered some inarticulate acknowledgment of Sir Philip's gracious consent, and rose, hurriedly, to break off the conversation. Perhaps his father saw that, this time, at least, it was better to try Hugh's forbearance no further. After a few more questions, which the young man answered as patiently as he could, the baronet let him go; and Hugh was glad to escape out of the room, out of the house, into the cold night air, which subdued his fever and brought him to himself. It was bright moonlight by this time,—a winter night, nearly as clear as day; and almost the first object which caught Hugh's eye was the smoke of Brakehurst rising from among its trees. He gazed at it steadily, with bitter thoughts. The old farm-house, picturesque and antique, with its heavy timbers and projecting windows, the only memorial of ancient possession which remained on the lands of Heathcote; how it would never be possible to look at it again, without perceiving a monument and memorial of this shameful episode in the family history; how it would never be possible to forget that scandalous debt and its payment, while the house-smoke curled above those trees, so near that it could not be excluded from the landscape or the vision of the Umphravilles. Hugh ground his teeth as he gazed in powerless resentment: his good influences were gone; his young happiness, the tenderest influence of all, was obscured; he turned a blank angry gaze round him, defying the whole world. Two people were guilty, and how many had been made miserable! What

desolation had followed in the footsteps of that inexcusable sin! How many evil emotions, headlong impulses of passion, had risen from this vice, which, after all, in its own person, was so poorly punished! And Hugh saw only one side of the picture, not the sorest. Oh! sin, sin! abominable, desperate, deadlier than murder! But Hugh did not say that,—not knowing, poor boy, what manner of spirit he was of. His cry was against Providence, who punished the innocent for the guilty; and thus he returned, no better for that beneficent glory of light and darkness which had been opened to his eyes to soothe him,—blind to the teaching of the earth and the heavens, blaming the Maker of all in his secret heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

My lady was still at Brighton, at her inn, living in extreme quietness and seclusion, desiring no one to know. She did not deny Evelyn and Edie their holiday pleasure in the gay streets and beach, which were new and captivating to the country girls; but they went out, generally, under the escort of my lady's maid, and not in her own company. One day they drove to Westwood, for which my lady had secretly commenced negotiations some time ago. It was a pretty house, though it looked small after Heathcote; and immediately in front of it was the sea, resplendent in wintry sunshine, which did all its ebbing and flowing in shelter of the cliff, and, from the windows of Westwood, was always in full tide. It was an exceedingly novel and amusing experience for the girls, to arrange a new house: it was, indeed, an entirely new idea to them, who knew nothing of changed habitations. Edie ran about the vacant rooms in great glee, deciding what this and that should be; yet even Edie faltered a little, when it occurred to her that all the new arrangements must be only for my lady, Evelyn, and herself, and that "the boys" needed no selection of rooms which would suit them. "I don't believe it!" cried Edie: "I know better; they'll all come when they know we're here." But when my lady's maid, Martha, shook her sober head, the impossible revealed itself even to Edie, and the little girl sat down on the floor and cried heartily; for Edie did not understand as yet how any one should submit to be unhappy:

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she thought, if she were Harry, she would run away. Though this was a sad drawback to the pleasure, still there was a pleasure in going over all this vacant place, and deciding how it should be arranged. Then the view, the great wide sweep of sea, in which, if you strained your eyes a good deal, and made believe a little, you could see the sunny Isle of Wight shining far off in the sunshine, and the spars of the shipping, a wintry forest, in Portsmouth Harbour, and which, at the other side, included, beyond dispute, the cliffs of Brighton; and the garden, where the close natural grass had been shorn into a lovely lawn, and where art had aided, instead of superseding nature, leaving great bushes of furze around the soft enclosure,—furze which had no great beauty now, but bore a promise; and the flower terraces, sloping softly over the side of the cliff, looking down upon Westhampton nestling underneath; not to speak of the pretty morning room within, with the cheerful bay-window, and the chamber up-stairs, with the broad low lattice, and honeysuckle, which seemed to have been made for Evelyn, and "the darling little room," opening into my lady's, which was to be bestowed on the ecstatic Edie. There never was, on the whole, a more satisfactory house. And the breezy line of Downs fell off behind in many a fold and slope, this very cliff, which bore the house of Westwood, being an outlying height of the same range which sheltered Heathcote. As the party drove back to Brighton, the whole was discussed with wonderful animation. The house had to be furnished, and my lady proposed going to London to give her orders, which made Edie restless with excitement and importunate in petitions. "Oh! mamma, Evelyn's been in London; she's going to Miss Latimer; she doesn't mind it. Oh! mamma, take me!" cried Edie; and, as Evelyn did not dislike the idea of a day's solitude under charge of Martha, there was good hope for the little petitioner. Then the household itself had to be thought of. My lady meant to have two maids and a man, with, perhaps, a maid for Evelyn, and, perhaps, a gardener,—new servants, new furniture, new rooms, a new house. The extent of the novelty was overpowering; and even Evelyn, though she sighed and endeavoured to recal to her memory how sad it was, could not help a little stir of expectation; and my lady smiled to see her children, and never said to them how the thing which made her own heart sink most was the very novelty which, to them, had a charm in its every detail.

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Accordingly, when my lady went to London, Edie, in the highest spirits, accompanied her. They were to return the same evening; and Evelyn, with pensive pleasure, prepared to enjoy her day of solitude: she loved to be alone and to think, as she supposed; but Evelyn did not think. Her sweet young imagination and tender mind were only shadowed over with sweet passing reflections, as was the sea, crisping under the wind, and changing into all colours and all brightnesses as the clouds passed, and the sun. To have the prosaic necessity of lunch forced upon her by Martha, after a forenoon's musing of this kind, was rather hard upon Evelyn; but when she had submitted to that necessity—and the submission was rewarded by the pretty tray, with its white napkin, and great glass goblet of white milk, the plate of ruddy fruit, the white bread and fairy pats of butter, with which Martha tempted her young lady's appetite—Evelyn resolved, though it was rather a bold step, upon a walk,—a walk all by herself, with Martha in attendance, and on the Pier. It was a dull, cloudy January day, not cold, but the clouds lay low and the atmosphere was dense; and, looking at it from within doors, the prospect did not seem inviting, though it was more pleasant than it looked when you got fairly out. Evelyn thought she would like to go all by herself, to lean over and listen to the ripple of the sea. There was no wind, but it was not a summer ripple; the dash of the water under the pier was low and sullen, breaking now and then, as the swaying of the waves became heavier, into a kind of moan. There were very few people walking, and Evelyn put up her veil and turned her face to what little wind there was, and leaned over, looking down upon the water. What she was thinking of, indeed, passes the knowledge of this history: she thought she was thinking; and it is certain she watched the heavy heave of the sea and the sullen retreat it made, and noticed how high the stray drops of foam came up, with an unfailing observation, of which she herself was only half aware. Martha feared Miss Evelyn would take cold: Martha proposed a smart walk, which was much better for the health; and, though a smart walk was not at all in Evelyn's mind, she consented to it, for sake of the silence and the enjoyment of what she was pleased to call "her own thoughts." But when they were returning again, an encounter happened, which much disturbed those thoughts of Evelyn's. Without warning or preparation, with her veil still thrown back, and her mind wrapped in its gentle meditations, it happened to

Evelyn to meet once more that hero of her innocent fancy, who had asked her name at the Broadmead school-feast. He saw her; he almost stopped, and put up his hand to take off his hat with a sudden involuntary gesture of delighted recognition, but suddenly recollected himself, and went slowly past, throwing all his recognition into his eyes. And when Evelyn saw him —she could not help herself—she could have dropped through the Pier with shame and vexation; but suddenly all Minnie's hints about his interest in herself rushed to her mind, and nothing in the world could have prevented her from blushing crimson, and looking most anxiously and visibly away from him, not to see how he looked. Astonishing as it was, however, Evelyn did see how he looked, in spite of her eyes, which were fixed upon the Parade, and went entirely beyond him. He passed, and the blush was just beginning to fade, despite Evelyn's terror lest Martha should have observed it, when a hasty step and voice behind made her look round. "I beg your pardon; but I think this is yours," said the same hero, holding out to Evelyn a little band of velvet with a gold clasp, which had been upon her arm but this moment. Evelyn could not conceive what legerdemain had whisked it off. She held out her hand for it with a little tremor, and thanked the finder in so low a voice, that the stranger had to bend down his uncovered head to hear. Yes, it was hers: she thanked him and made a faltering half-curtsey in answer to his bow. Martha, who pressed forward to hear what it was, drowned Evelyn's voice in louder acknowledgments, and the girl turned and glided away in a little panic. She was afraid of him, though he was the hero; and if my lady should ask and find out that she recognized him! Poor Evelyn, in her own self-consciousness and in her embarrassing recollection of what Minnie had said, felt almost as if she had planned a secret interview. When he was gone, she hurried along so fast and so softly that she quite succeeded in concealing herself from the eager eyes of the young stranger. He thought she must have disappeared, vanished into the air; and though he inquired with the most persevering vigilance for a week after, he could hear nothing of any family of Evelyns. He did not know whether they were the Surrey Evelyns: he knew of nothing but a young lady; and as young ladies are far from remarkable occurrences in Brighton, Evelyn's hero did not find out where she was. But she wore the bracelet all day; wondering, with a pretty superstition, how it managed, at that particular

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moment, to slide off her arm, and sat more silent than ever with some embroidery, weaving to herself a secret romance. This delicate morsel of mystery, innocent, simple, a thing which very likely nothing could ever come of, gave quite a characteristic charm to Evelyn's musings. Nobody knew of them; nobody could have thought what a glorious unimaginable Sir Charles Grandison that hero was growing; yet Evelyn, tender heart, went on with her dream, pleasing herself. Sometimes a thought of telling mamma crossed her imagination like a cold shadow; but what was there to tell? Nothing but a little play of fancy, a pretty, foolish temerity, daring the great wizard of youth; but yet it would have been a great deal safer had Evelyn told mamma.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The next day, my lady's preparations began in earnest; even Evelyn was drawn out of her dreams, to look over the upholsterer's pretty patterns, to choose the chintz for the morning parlour, and the chairs and couches for the drawing-room. The London tradesmen promised impossibilities with the liveliest self-confidence. There was very little doing in town—the season had not begun—and Messrs. Damask and Buhl were hungry for work, and pounced upon it like wolves. Everything was to be ready in so astonishingly short a time, that my lady's maid held up her hands in consternation, not at the incredible speed promised, but at the daring "falsity" of the man who undertook it; but, notwithstanding Martha's scepticism, Messrs. Damask and Buhl kept their word, and within a very short time indeed after leaving Heathcote, my lady, with her new servants and her women-children, entered the house of her widowhood. A January day, cold, bright, frosty—sparkling in a blaze of chilly splendour from the sea, and melting the morning hoar-frost into jewels of cold dew over all the grass; a day when the smoke rose up with a blue curl and melted insensibly into the blue sharp air, which brought out all the angles of the Westhampton houses, and showed the far-off cottages and trees, like little pictures in enamel, so diminutive and clear. The garden had been trimmed, and showed an early sprinkling of golden and purple crocuses; and the snowdrops hung their pensive heads over the brown soil, already in handfuls. The windows of Westwood glittered in the sun;

the glow of firelight and warmth came from the great open door; a pert robin, perched on the outer sill of the bay window, kept chirping out his inquiries to the new-comers: everything without was bright, everything within was warm, cheerful, pleasant to look upon; but it happened strangely that all the brightnesses together were too much for my lady, and that, when she entered her new house, she hastened to the new bedchamber which was to be hers, and once more shut herself in, and was a long time alone,—no one knowing why. When my lady appeared again, Evelyn thought her eyes were wet; but if they were so, it was the last droppings of a tender dew; it was not the sharp, heavy, bitter rain of that hour of wintry solitude, whose struggles no one ever saw.

And now for the new house: the drawing-room looked out with three long windows upon the sea, windows from which, when the weather was "convenient," you could step out if you pleased upon the lawn, where at present the dew sparkled like icicles, and bits of hoar-frost lay under the dark furze bushes. One of the windows was filled up with a pretty toy of Evelyn's, (pardon, oh, science!) a very pretty miniature ocean, which this young lady found great pleasure and occupied much time in tending and making additions to. Between the windows stood two pretty low book-cases, very well filled with books. There were a great many low chairs, examples of comfort, and graceful little couches. The carpet was not a Turkey carpet, but a very pretty one, mossy and velvety, strewn over with bouquets of flowers, for my lady's taste for decorations was not of the geometrical order. The window in the corner nearest the fire was my lady's corner: by it stood a work-table, a little stand of books, a small writing-case; and, oddly enough, the girls thought, instead of choosing these as like as possible to her old work-table and book-stand, as Evelyn would have done in tenderness for her mother, my lady had selected very different articles, rather as *un*like than as like. There might be a certain sentiment in this too, possibly; but it was not so apparent as the old popular superficial sentiment, which furnished for Marie-Louise, in the Tuileries, apartments identical with those she left at home. Then the morning room, with its pretty chintz furniture and cozy simplicity: it was not a bit like Heathcote; not a single feature was there to remind them of the old home from which they had come,—and the same principle held throughout the house. My lady chose that all her surroundings, all that encircled her children, should be

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bright and cheerful, knowing very well how much effect these external influences have; but nothing was chosen to be like Heathcote, everything was novel, unfamiliar, without association, for so my lady thought best.

Within a day or two they had settled down and taken possession. Evelyn got her books arranged, and set up her embroidery-frame; the new governess, Miss Banks, arrived to the confusion of Edie's projects; and everything fell into every-day trim. "The boys" almost fulfilled Edie's predictions; they came in two separate parties,—Hugh by himself, rather fallen back into his old state of moodiness, and Rothes and Harry together—the very day on which they heard of my lady's arrival at Westwood. Though they had only been separated a fortnight, the meeting was quite a pathetic one; perhaps it showed them all, more than mere separation did, what the change was which had altered their life: not only parted for a time, but visiting each other in separate houses, the sons sitting down as guests at the mother's table. That was rather hard; and if Rothes had not been very forbearing, he and Hugh must have certainly quarrelled, each of them having so much to say to my lady, that neither could be content to spare her to the other. They had a great deal to tell her; and yet it was surprising how uneventful and dull these days had been, which, notwithstanding, accumulated so much which the mother ought to hear. One thing Hugh, with magnanimity and resolution, locked up in his own mind: he could not tell my lady of his father's proposal to him, nor of the intended sacrifice of Brakehurst; he determined generously that she should never know, and that, for her at least, the old house should be what it had always been,—a picturesque memorial of the past, and not a monument of the misfortune which had driven her from the home of her children. When the time came to go away, Harry was very reluctant to accompany his brothers; he had even managed to fall asleep in my lady's parlour, on the great velvety hearth-rug stretched out before the fire, and was extremely indignant when he was roused. He did not want to go; why should he go? papa did not care for him; he had as good a right to stay as Edie had! And even when Harry's murmurings were silenced, Hugh and Rothes had a difficulty with my lady, who could not consent to send forth her boy half asleep, through this wintry night, for the six miles' walk to Heathcote; so they had to wait till my lady's own new pony carriage was taken out and prepared for them. It was the

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mother's amends of consolation to her youngest boy, for Harry had no objection now to try the new ponies, the new vehicle, and to draw his cap over his eyes as he got up beside Hugh, who was to drive, not fearing that by-and-bye the reins would be trusted in his own hand. But it was strange to have them come and go away, leaving the house again with only the mother and the daughters in it; strange that the people in Westhampton should come to their doors to stare at the "company," the visitors at Westwood; strange that the very servants in the house, unfamiliar with their names, should make continual mistakes between Mr. Hugh and Mr. Rothes, at which Martha scolded bitterly. When the boys were gone, my lady and Evelyn remained together silently in the drawing-room, where there was no light but the fire. The fire gleamed in the great mirror with a wayward light, showing the two figures in the room by glimpses, and deepening, with its flying touches upon the distant wall and furniture, the dark depths of the glass. Looking into this mirror, you could see my lady walking slowly up and down before the fire, stooping her head, moving slowly, folding her hands together in thought. The ruddy light danced about her like a child at play, burnishing with a sudden gleam, like gold, the rich olive of her satin dress; leaping up for an instant upon that face, so thoughtful, so serious,—that head still fair in unbroken maturity, but bowed with cares which were not the common cares of life. My lady could not speak, could not relieve herself by sharing those burdens; it was not possible to divide them. She moved about, pondering painfully, gravely, but without agitation, upon the darkened ways of Providence; calm, not without hope and comfort, which still abounded to her, yet with an ache at her heart.

And by the fire sat Evelyn, bending down, leaning her arms on her lap, and her face in her hands, thinking *her* thoughts, which were not like my lady's,—which, in the first place, followed the boys through the breezy, starry night, with a little tender farewell feeling—"poor boys!"—for them, who were obliged to go away; and a little, just a little, momentary youthful impatience at this pressure of unhappiness, which it is not in the nature of youth to yield to; and then they floated forth, sweet thoughts! in a charmed current of their own. How many pictures rose and shone, and melted into other pictures as fair, while my lady went slowly up and down across the hearth, and the warm fire-light flickered on the soft shining

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olive of her gown, perhaps Evelyn herself could not have told. This was how the mother and daughter mused together. Do you think they showed no sympathy to each other? Not such sympathy, perhaps, as if they had been whispering together, talking over their various visions; yet the warm thread of life joined them in a more subtle union. The cares of middle age and the reveries of youth do not run together; yet the one must have been before the other can be. Evelyn was rousing up, even through her dreams, out of the child's consolation of acquiescence, to know and understand something of what was in her mother's heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

And so it came about that, day by day, Westwood grew less novel, and their changed manner of life more familiar to them. Hugh left for Oxford and Rothes for Rugby: they were no more separated from these two than if they had still been at Heathcote; and though poor Harry gave my lady a great deal of thought, he was coming and going so constantly that they could scarcely be said to be separated even from him. And Sir Philip remained perfectly quiet, doing nothing to disturb his wife. My lady had not exasperated her unfaithful husband; she had not thought it necessary to fight the law and him in one person; she had accepted the hard necessities of her position, feeling sure that some of them at least were inevitable necessities of nature as well as of law. She knew indeed that Sir Philip could have forced her to return under his roof; could have compelled her to live there in hard and dreary bondage; could have taken her children from her, and left her alone, as if she had been the disgraced person, divested of everything that could make life bearable. She knew all that; and my lady did not wonder that the knowledge of it made some oppressed women mad, and helped on that misery which the law made a possible infliction; but she herself was not a passionate, jealous, exasperated woman, thinking her own injury great enough to overbear all rules. She had schooled herself to seek the expediencies of the question, to make the best of it; and Sir Philip was not a villain. Great villains, like great heroes, are few in number; he had neither courage nor wickedness sufficient to make him assail his wife. Yet the relationship which these two houses bore to each other was

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somewhat embarrassing to society in the neighbourhood. Everybody called once upon my lady, eager to show that they had nothing to disapprove of; but somehow nobody felt quite comfortable in going again. The younger portion of society thought my lady had been too gentle; the elder ladies wondered how she could leave that poor boy, and did not think it was "delicate" to cut Sir Philip entirely. It would look as if they knew all about it; and it was scarcely "delicate" for ladies to know about such things. If Lady Umphraville had only been wise enough to remove to a greater distance! but it was not pleasant to meet the husband and the wife on the same day; to keep up friendly relations with both; perhaps to risk the shocking possibility of a chance meeting between them at one's own house. So the excellent people who lived within visiting distance of both houses were excessively embarrassed by their vicinity, especially as it was now known that there was to be an election at Hustings,—that Sir Philip had magnanimously given up his seat, but meant to stand again,—and that the country party, pledged of old to his interest, could not seek another man to oppose him, but was bound in honour to lend him its aid in public, whatever might be its private conduct to himself. The immediate consequence of all this was, that my lady found herself left very much alone at Westwood. Perhaps she did not mind it a great deal for the company's sake; but she did mind it profoundly as an indication of how people were thinking and speaking of herself and her family. Matrons, mothers of households, English gentlewomen of my lady's mind and years, are the people, of all others, who most resent the idea of being talked about and discussed in common committee of society. Almost my lady, who was not a perfect, immaculate personage, would rather have done something a little wrong than have exposed the secrets of her house to profane tongues; and to think that people were speaking of her and of Sir Philip, imagining the "scenes" which must have been at Heathcote before she left,—discussing her feelings and her motives,—curious about her new habits and mode of life, was gall and bitterness to Lady Umphraville. Little annoyances close at hand seem sometimes bigger than great ones. The villagers at Westhampton, finding out her story, grew curious about my lady; her own servants joined in the general inquisitiveness; and by this time the common indignation against Sir Philip had pretty well worn out and evaporated. The common people began to pity him in his solitude, and to think it hard-

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hearted and unforgiving of his wife. All this my lady perceived as by an instinct: it vexed her private thoughts with an irrestrainable irritation; it made her less happy in the solaces which were left to her; but no one ever knew that she was aware of anything but the universal sympathy and respect, which indeed were still hers, when you got at the heart.

Meanwhile Evelyn wanted occupation sadly. Miss Banks, Edie's governess, was of an enterprising temper; she stirred the elder sister up to a resuscitation of her German studies, that unfailing resource of youthful leisure; but Evelyn felt sadly the want of all her familiar pensioners, and it was hard work, at first, finding out who were the poor and the sick at Westhampton, which was the most obstinately prosperous village on all the Sussex coast. The vicar was young and handsome, and looked a great deal at my lady's pew. Evelyn did not quite like visiting the school, where somehow the vicar always got note of the presence of the ladies from Westwood. A private, almost a secret, footpath wound down the face of the cliff, from the garden to the beach, concealed among bushes of furze and slopes of the ascent: and here Evelyn found her greatest resource. She came out with her book, and sat upon the rustic seat half-way down, where nobody could see her, but where the water lay broad and full at her feet; or she put the book aside, and went down all the way, to make another persevering, despairing search for *actiniæ*, where she knew very well no *actiniæ* were to be found. Sometimes a bit of pretty coraline rewarded her exertions: and Evelyn thought despairingly, if this were only the soft Devon coast instead of the Sussex, how many glories of the sea might be transferred to her aquarium, instead of the poor bit of seaweed, which was all she had for her toil.

One day she had descended as usual, and was skirting the low bits of rock embedded in the sand, keeping her eyes upon the pools, lest anything might be visible; but doing it daintily, for Evelyn knew that the search was not very hopeful, and accordingly did not abandon herself to it with the excitement of a neophyte. There was not a creature visible on the beach, save herself and one other wanderer, who was a good way off, and whom Evelyn did not concern herself much about. Suddenly, a good way out upon the glistening sands, she saw a rare specimen of *algæ*, which she had long coveted. She stood looking at it, contriving how to thread the watery maze before her, to reach the weed which mocked her at a distance. The

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tide had not been long out; the sands were oozy and full of moisture. How to get at it! As Evelyn stood looking, the other individual drew near. Somehow or other he found out what she was looking at; perhaps he too had an aquarium, and knew the value of this salt-water leafage. However that might be, he calculated the point her eye was bent on with the closest nicety, plunged across the sinking sand, which only bore a moment and then obliterated his hasty footprint, and returned in triumph with his prize. Already the young student of natural science knew who he was. Alas! this bit of study was likely to hasten her acquirements in another science than that of marine botany. Perhaps she should have been rude and gone away before he returned. Perhaps; but Evelyn did not go away—she thought it so kind, so chivalrous, so wonderful an instance of natural sympathy: how did he know what she wanted?—until he stood by her, taking off his hat again as he presented the seaweed, the fresh wind lifting the hair on his forehead and freshening the colour on his cheek. Perhaps it was wrong, but Evelyn could not help feeling—could not help betraying to herself, that she knew him, a fact which he was still less likely to conceal. "Is it for your own collection? I shall be proud," said the young man; "but this is a very barren coast. Ah! you should go to Ilfracombe."

"Yes; they say it is very beautiful there," said Evelyn.

"And thi beach, one must acknowledge, is not interesting," said the stranger, with an inquiring glance, which Evelyn did not comprehend.

"I cannot tell. I belong to Sussex; I like it best," said Evelyn, simply; "but there are not many sea-anemones. Thank you: I am very glad to have this; it is so pretty in the water."

She turned to leave her strange acquaintance, but he turned with her, quite naturally and simply. "I had once the pleasure of seeing you at Broadmead," said the young man. "There was some little ecclesiastical demonstration. I cannot hope that you remember it; or, at least, that you remember me."

"Oh! the school-feast!" said Evelyn; and the poor girl blushed with overpowering guilt and confusion. She was thankful to think that he could not possibly know how well she remembered him: yet, to tell the truth, such blushes as these contained a great deal of information, of which her companion was not slow to avail himself.

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"How do our excellent friends get on?" he said. "They were in trouble about some unfortunate Dissenter: what had the poor man done? That good rector, looking so peremptory and puzzled—and those captivating sisters of his—one never meets such expression, such simplicity, save in the country. What had the unhappy culprit done?"

"Oh! indeed; it was serious," said Evelyn: "it was about a church-rate."

"Were *you* interested in it?" asked the stranger.

"Oh! we were not going very much to the village then; I was thinking of other things," said Evelyn, apologetically, meaning that, if she was not interested in it, she ought to have been.

"Let me carry this seaweed; it will soil your glove," said Evelyn's companion, bending over her to recover the treasure, which she had been carrying in her hand.

"Oh, no, please! thank you! I would rather carry it; I have not far to go," cried Evelyn in a sudden panic. She could not tell how to get rid of him. And what if my lady, or Edie, or Miss Banks should be looking over the cliff and see him?—what would they think? Evelyn grew quite frightened and nervous; she only answered in monosyllables; and at last the stranger perceived that his best policy was to withdraw. Accordingly he bade her good morning with a most effective, telling, and magnanimous reluctance, which did not fail to have its due influence upon Evelyn, and went on at a quicker pace towards Westhampton. When he ventured to look round a moment after, Evelyn was gone. Where had she gone? This immediate disappearance began to look magical. He turned back wondering, to see what possible way of escape there was, and went about the spot examining curiously. Even at this moment Evelyn could see him: she sheltered herself behind a turn of the path, and gazed down upon him through the branches of a kind of shrubby pine, which grew luxuriantly in that sea-air, something of the genus cedar, of which neither Evelyn nor we know the proper name. A wild unkempt bush of the same hid the little door, which, however, the young man discovered at last, with an exclamation of triumph. "Found at last!" he said to himself, unaware of the watching eyes and ears that heard his exclamation; and then, with a long look up to the top of the cliff, he hurried round to find out what house there was, accessible from that door, and who lived in it. Surely he had fallen upon the

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family of Evelyns now. While Evelyn was fain to rest on the seat half way up the path, and take breath. It was so strange, wonderful, like a story in a book; but was it right? should she not go in immediately and tell mamma how she got her seaweed, how she had been talking to a stranger, and how he was not quite a stranger either, since she remembered seeing him at Broadmead? But Evelyn's cheeks burned at the thought; she could not tell my lady without a hundred tell-tale blushes. Why should she blush? he was nothing to her. Alas! this was a very difficult matter to determine; and Evelyn at last fell back upon the natural casuistry which is very ready to render help in such dilemmas. She had spoken to strangers many a time; she would never have dreamt of being confused about this stranger, had he been an old man, or a poor man, or in short, at all different from what he was; and then Evelyn felt very sure that he would find means of getting introduced to my lady, which would be an every way satisfactory solution to the difficulty; so she went in, after resting a long time on the way,—went in, a little hurried in manner, with twice her natural amount of colour, "said nothing to nobody," and spent the most part of the day hanging about her aquarium, placing in it, to the best advantage, her new piece of beautiful weed. This weed Edie was disposed to ask a hundred questions about: where Evelyn got it? whether it was far out on the sands? whether anybody saw her wading through the pools to seek it? whether she had her overshoes on? or how she escaped wetting her feet? Edie found out that Evelyn looked rather confused about her new acquisition, and that the guilty colour came to her cheeks a hundred times in the hour, taking occasion by stray words which did not mean anything. Mischievous Edie was very much interested in this, and teazed her sister accordingly with the most importunate inquiries, declaring that next time she too would go to the beach and try her fortune. And poor Evelyn blushed and grew still more nervous, thinking—what if he should appear some time when Edie was with her?—what if he should come up and speak to her, and convict her of a secret acquaintanceship? Alas! so far this dangerous delightful mystery of romance did not contribute much to Evelyn's peace.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

The next day Evelyn satisfied her conscience by staying resolutely in-doors. As she could not venture out without a fear of meeting this hero of her thoughts, she resolved to be prudent and stay at home; accordingly she ventured no further than the lawn, and did not stay long even there, fearful lest some glimpse of the dreaded cavalier might disturb her eyes. This extreme and praiseworthy caution did not, however, preserve Evelyn from a state of mind entirely above the ordinary occurrences of the day. She forgot a great many things that morning, did not read any, scarcely spoke at all, but bent with devotion over her embroidery: there she could "think," as she called it, without interruption; and her dream wove itself on, scene after scene, as buds and leaves grew under her hand. If she ever made an effort to throw off this charmed absorption, it was quite ineffectual: every one of those chance meetings had been so romantic, so captivating to her young imagination. To think they should have found each other out the very first time they met—what a wonderful instance it was of that instantaneous attraction, which happens so seldom in this matter-of-fact world! And then the bracelet which he had restored to her, and which Evelyn wore always; and those rose leaves of seaweed, unfolding so beautifully in their little sea before her eyes, visible remembrances of a tale which was just beginning and which might be——. Evelyn paused breathless, not daring to think what might come of it; and then the blush of conscious guilt came to her face as she glanced aside at my lady, who sat unsuspectingly in the window, reading the newspapers. To have a secret which she did not tell her mother! Poor Evelyn's heart palpitated, her very neck burned crimson, and the blood tingled to her finger points; but nobody observed her confusion and distress, and so the girl fell away softly into her consolatory dreams, thinking this time how he would be sure to find a legitimate introduction to Westwood, planning it all out for him, and already breathing freer at the fancy, which she could almost believe to be already true. Next day her vigilance over herself relaxed; but she took care to take her walk in quite a different direction. This time she went over Westhampton Common to a cottage at the end of it, where lived a young sempstress whom my lady meant to employ. Speaking to this girl, who was not very strong

and who somewhat reminded Evelyn of one of her old home pensioners, she came to herself for the time, and got the better of her fancies; and, even when she had left the cottage, Evelyn, occupying her simple imagination with various plans about this new *protégée*—infallible plans, by which her health was to be maintained, and the evil spirit, consumption, kept at a distance—preserved herself still a little longer from visions less disinterested;—when, lo! she started with fright and a sudden impulse of running away. There he was! but he did not speak to her this time; he was wise in his generation: he only bowed and *looked*, and passed on. How very delicate and good of him, Evelyn thought as she hastened home; but though she approved it so much, and was so extremely relieved by his forbearance, still it is possible that Evelyn might be the least in the world disappointed. She was rather sad that afternoon; she read a story in an annual, and spent an hour at the piano, singing pathetic songs. After that, she quite bestirred herself, and was unusually obliging to everybody. It was all over, Evelyn thought, that ridiculous, foolish, naughty dream! How could she be so very foolish, so sinful, to think about a stranger who, she was sure, did not think of her, and not to tell mamma? Ah! everything was delusive, deceitful,—everything but home!

So, of course, being quite emancipated from her folly, Evelyn resumed her old freedom of action; and, wherever she went, though she took the most opposite directions, somehow or other, had constantly the luck to meet this stranger. He always appeared, too, at such opportune times: once when she was helping a little boy from the village to pick up the scattered individual portions of a bundle of fire-wood; once when she was stretching up to a tree, just too high for her, to secure a pretty bit of moss. Sometimes she just managed to miss him, by a fortunate little stratagem: but now these chance meetings had occurred too often, and they had become too much like old acquaintances, to tell mamma. "I hear Mrs. Hastings will be home again shortly," said her cavalier one day (she had found out that his name was Wentworth); "she is my oldest acquaintance here, and I trust she will do me the kindness to make me her escort—to present me to Mrs. Evelyn."

"Mrs. Evelyn?" cried Evelyn, in astonishment.

"Yes," said the young man, who made this a stray shot of

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discovery. "Oh! have I mistaken? you are residing with friends? you are not at home?" Perhaps it was only then, for the first time, that Evelyn saw how very wrong she was.

"You are mistaken; I am Miss Umphraville," she said, with a little dignity, turning hastily away. The young man started violently, and became quite pale: he stammered out, "I beg your pardon," with a faltering voice. Evelyn could not conceive what was the matter with him; but he did not leave her: he followed as if he did not very well know what he was doing—followed her close down a descending path, which was almost within sight of Westwood; and there came Miss Banks, with spectacles and a book in her hand, close upon them. Evelyn did not know whether she was most relieved or frightened. She said, hastily, "It is the gentleman who helped me to pick up the wood for little Willie Hubbard," as she took the governess's arm, trembling, dismayed, yet with a sense of safety. Miss Banks glanced up without her spectacles, and the gentleman bowed and went away.

"Helped you to pick up the sticks for little Willie Hubbard—humph!" said Miss Banks. "He's too young a man, my dear, for a young lady to make acquaintance with. Don't speak to him again, there's a good child!" and Miss Banks re-arranged her spectacles, and went on with her book.

Oh! calm middle-age! Oh! youth, with all its throbs and aches, and flying pulses! Evelyn went home quite humbly under the shadow of the governess, without saying anything more; thankful that some one from home had seen him, that she had broken her silence, although only by a word, and that Miss Banks had passed it over so quietly. She felt as if she had just escaped from some pressing urgent danger; she trembled over her whole frame, grew pale, and thought she could scarcely walk home; and, when she reached Westwood, did not pause till she had shut herself up in her own room, to collect her thoughts a little, and see what it was which had agitated her so much. And, in the first place, Evelyn vowed to herself, with clasped hands, like one suddenly waking out of a dream, that, unless he came to Westwood, and was known to my lady, she would never, never, never speak to him again. This was some consolation to her conscience, and relieved her; then she began to think over it all. All this time he had known her only by her christian name; and why was he so much shocked, so startled to find out that

she was Evelyn Umphraville? Could it be that the same reason which made my lady's visitors so few at Westwood, made Evelyn's hero shrink from her at the sound of her real name? The poor girl's cheeks burned with indignant shame at the thought. If he cared for her—and he surely cared for her (Evelyn would not have said "loved" for her life!)—what should her name, or her father's sin, be to him? And if he did not care for her, what right had he to come so often, tracing her innocent steps, finding her out wherever she went? Poor Evelyn hid her face, and cried as though her heart would break. It was all her own fault—all, everything; she ought not to have spoken to him; she ought to have told my lady. What could he possibly think of her—so unmaidenly, so over-frank—suffering a stranger to make acquaintance with her!—and yet——. It is not easy to condemn one's-self out-and-out, after the first moment. Unconsciously Evelyn raised her head, dried her eyes, began to compose herself. Was it *her* fault? Could she help meeting him? Could she help the common politeness of thanking him when they met first on the beach? Was it her fault that she knew him again, when they happened to pass each other on the same road? And, as by this time Evelyn's mind began to succumb to this natural sophistry, she gradually took heart, made a careful toilette, and was quite herself again by the time she had concluded, that presently everything would be made right by "the proper introduction" which Mrs. Hastings, or some one else, would give him to my lady and my lady's house. But Evelyn repeated her vow—not so strenuously, yet with sufficient firmness—before she went down-stairs. Unless he came to Westwood, and gained my lady's sanction, she was quite sure she would never, never, never speak to him again.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

But it happened, unfortunately for Evelyn's virtue, that her vow was not put to the test, as she expected it to have been. True, she shut herself within doors for a few days, during which time she supposed it possible that the unfortunate Wentworth vainly kept watch over the environs of Westwood; but when she ventured forth again, the hero was not visible:

even when she wandered along the beach—curious to know whether he was still there, but prepared to make a precipitate retreat in case she should see him—for nearly a whole day, no sign of his neighbourhood presented itself to the eyes of Evelyn —he was gone!

And, if truth must be told, coincident with the certainty of his going, a paleness came to Evelyn's cheek, and a languor to her frame. She could not tell what was the matter with her when my lady questioned her, anxiously. The smallest cause in the world, or no cause, brought sudden tears to her eyes. She had no cold, no cough, no visible symptoms of illness: the doctors did not know what to make of her mysterious complaint. At last, everybody settled that it was a nervous attack,—a thing not very uncommon with young ladies. Whereupon everybody set about to cheer Evelyn: she was no longer left alone to indulge her fancies,—no longer permitted the luxury of stealing into the dark and crying when she pleased. Poor tender heart! all the shock and trial of leaving home had been too much for her, it was said. But my lady looked anxious, and kept a watchful solicitous eye upon her child. My lady knew that children do not droop and pine away for sake of their parents; she could not tell what other solution to give of Evelyn's trouble; but she watched her with an anxious heart. Early February, chill and damp, and uncheerful, had come by this time, lengthening the days, without increasing the pleasure of them; and once more Sir Philip and his doings became the prominent subject in the *Sussex Gazette*. Once more my lady's heart beat, when the newspaper came in, with painful excitement. Immediately after the meeting of Parliament, which was early that year, a new writ was issued for the borough of Hustings. The excitement attending this election was unprecedented, the *Sussex Gazette* informed its readers. "Domestic disclosures, of a painful character, relating to a family which stood high in the county, gave a painful personal interest to a contest, which, simply for its political features, might well attract the eyes of the whole county," said this enlightened member of the press; and my lady read, with humiliation, the allusions which those provincial politicians made to herself and her history, and found her own predictions fulfilled in the use which was made even of her womanly and silent withdrawal from her husband's house. Some of them went the length of telling the tale plainly,—asking the virtuous, home-loving, right-minded bur-

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gesses of Hustings, how they could elect, as their representative, a man whose vices had driven "an accomplished lady, well-known and highly-respected," from his house? My lady writhed under all these complimentary wounds. It was precisely the kind of attack which wounded her most deeply, though the excellent complacent orators who made the speeches solaced themselves with thinking how soothing, how gratifying, to poor Lady Umphraville's feelings, these testimonies to her worth must be. Sir Philip's opponent was a young man of family, who bore an historical name, and had an hereditary connection with a certain set of political opinions. He was a highly courteous, bland, gentlemanly person, who made speeches delightfully civil, and while he referred with cutting elegance to his honourable opponent's long absence from England, said not a word of the cause of that absence. Neither was it referred to by this polite candidate's special friends; but the honest men of local celebrity, Mr. Woburn's committee,—good burgesses, who were indignant in their hearts, in sincere reality, or who loved a piece of scandal, or who understood the *argumentum ad hominem* better than any abstruser line of reasoning—were not so delicate. One thing, however, became very soon evident to my lady, who read, with the unfailing interest of pain, every word said or written on the subject: no allusion of the kind was made or tolerated at any of the many meetings reported in the newspapers, where a certain Mr. Wentworth happened to make one of the speakers, or even (on the platform) of the audience. She knew the other names, more or less: she did not know Mr. Wentworth; and how it happened that his presence, and his alone, restrained these voluble men of Hustings, it was impossible to conceive. "Wentworth! Wentworth!" she said to herself one day, aloud, thinking that she was alone; "Who can this be?"

"What did you say, mamma?" asked Evelyn, who had come in at the moment, and who was deadly pale.

"Nothing, my love," answered my lady, cheerfully. "Never mind: it was only a name I saw in the papers; for, Evie," she continued, falling out of the artificial cheerfulness adopted for poor Evelyn's sake, "this election at Hustings interests me a great deal: I can't help reading what they say."

Evelyn came behind my lady's chair and kissed her hand, caressingly; then she went away to the furthest corner of the room, where her mother could not see her, and took up a book for a safeguard. A sudden fit of trembling had

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seized Evelyn. Wentworth! Who could it be? Could it be *him?* Was he at Hustings? What was he doing?—for it might as well have been a fatal accident as an election meeting, from what my lady said. It seemed a very, very long time, an age to Evelyn, before my lady put down the paper; and it was some time after that before she left the room; for Evelyn, always carrying her consciousness with her, was afraid to betray her interest in the name in her mother's presence. When she was alone, she seized the paper eagerly. Yes, there it was! Mr. Wentworth—H. Wentworth, Esq.—Herbert, that was his name: she found so much about him, that she sat for a very long time reading eagerly; and yet nothing about him either, only his name, and the meetings he had attended, and where he was to be, and where he had been, and, at last, a speech,—a speech, his own words. Evelyn read it all, from beginning to end; but there was not a word in it which betrayed his identity: it was all about politics, which Evelyn had not much knowledge of, and it was not the speech of a natural orator, in whose hands any subject might glow with human interest. No, it was mere politics, party principles, one side against the other side. It was long, it was his own very voice and utterance, and Evelyn read it through, word for word; but at the end had not caught a single glimpse of the man. She read it with a good deal of agitation, poor child, gleaning only this one thing out of it, that, though he never once mentioned Sir Philip, he spoke in opposition to her father. Was this the reason why he was so much startled by her name? She read all the advertisements of Mr. Woburn's committee, and all their arrangements, with anxious interest, wondering why Mr. Wentworth should be concerned against her father—whether he knew Sir Philip to be her father?—whether this was the cause of his sudden disappearance? and, finally, whether his opposition to Sir Philip would prevent him from coming to Westwood? Poor Evelyn was a great deal too much agitated, too much concerned about all these questions: she was paler than ever that evening, more "nervous," more and more inclined, on the slightest provocation—an elevated tone, a rapidly-closed door, a loud step—to be surprised into tears. This knowledge of his absence, besides other effects it might have, took away a little daily expectation of the advent of visitors,—to wit, of the arrival of Mrs. Hastings, with Mr. Wentworth in her train—with which Evelyn had been pleasing her fancy. And she

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was so anxious he should come,—anxious, not so much to see him, as that she might be able to acknowledge she had seen him,—anxious that he should vindicate himself, and clear her conscience of this one secret. And, instead of this, to find out that he was in Hustings, in the midst of the election, working against her father! It was the very first personal cross that had come to Evelyn; perhaps, but for the secret and guilty feeling of concealment attached to it, she might have rather luxuriated in her first grief; but, as it happened, it was her first great *fault* as well.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CARRIAGE, coming up the little avenue—a well-accustomed footman's summons at the door! It was quite the morning, too early for common visitors. Who could it be? Not Mrs. Hastings, Evelyn, bringing the stranger knight to my lady's feet: no need to blush and start, and rouse out of your reverie. Instead of any such startling visitor, only an old lady, very brisk, very active; almost as startling an appearance to Lady Umphraville as the other would have been to her daughter,—for it was old Lady Curtis, who came in chilly from the February winds, with the withered old roses in her cheek blooming, in wintry freshness, almost as bright as the artificial roses in her bonnet. Grandmamma, with her usual vivacity, came up with outstretched hands to my lady, who rose, astonished and reluctant, to meet her. "How do you do, Nelly?" said the old lady; "glad to see you looking so well and so comfortable: I trust you did not expect, because you had left Heathcote, to get rid of me."

"I had not thought of it," said my lady, with a rising colour: "but you know the children are always pleased to see their grandmamma. You are welcome to Westwood."

"Thank you; that is very kind of you. I scarcely expected so much," said Lady Curtis, sitting down; "though you know, Eleanor, I warned you long ago, not to think—though it might seem very natural—that it was any use quarrelling with Philip's mother. I'm not a person easy to quarrel with, my dear, unless I wish it; so I've come to stay all day, my lady. Evelyn, come here, child, and kiss your grandmamma. Why, what's the matter? she looks as if she were ready to cry!"

"She is not well," said my lady, apologetically.

"Not well! One does not need to cry because one is unwell. Let me look at you, child," said the old lady: "why, Evie, you look quite startled and unsteady, as if you could not bear any one's eye. What's the matter? you've been doing something wrong!"

"Oh, grandmamma!" cried Evelyn, almost with a scream. She durst not lift up her eyes; she thought Lady Curtis had somehow found it all out, and had come to tell my lady; she felt as if she must sink upon the ground before her feet, and beg her forbearance; she thought she could never live to hear her folly told.

"Humph! I should let her have change of air: I should not keep her here moping by herself," said Lady Curtis. "I don't like her look at all, my lady; she should not stay here."

"She is going up to town in April," said my lady.

"To town? To whom? Are you going yourself, Eleanor?"

"No; she is to be with Miss Latimer, she and Susan Mitford; they are very fond of each other. I trust it will do Evelyn a great deal of good," said Lady Umphraville, who did not quite admire being questioned thus.

"With Miss Latimer? By-the-by, that is odd: she is on her way here, if I am not mistaken," said Lady Curtis. "I passed a—a vehicle on the road half-an-hour ago, and recognized the person in it as your friend. I believe you will find she is coming here." Coming here! Lady Curtis and Miss Latimer! My lady's brow clouded: it was a strange conjunction.

"Perhaps Susan is with her—she must be with her, Evelyn; that should cheer you, my child," said my lady, thinking that Susan's candid face would be a comfort even to herself, with grandmamma on one side of her and Aunt Margaret on the other.

"Yes, mamma," said Evelyn, faintly; and Evelyn took the first opportunity of leaving the room and stealing softly upstairs: she had to prepare herself even for meeting Susan. She did not think of her dear friend's arrival as she would have done a month ago. One thing wrong had made everything wrong for poor Evelyn; and Susan's arrival would but be the arrival of one more to suspect her, one more to wonder at her, one more totally ignorant of the real burden at her heart. And Evelyn had scarcely reached her own room, when the carriage which Lady Curtis had stigmatized as a "vehicle"

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arrived at the door of Westwood. It was a little dowager carriage of nondescript character, cosy, but of very ancient fashion, drawn by one comfortable fat brown horse, and attended by a small footman, who looked as if he might be only a page in buttons when his great-coat was off. But there was no Susan to refresh the house, which Miss Latimer entered with solemnity: Aunt Margaret was alone. She went up to my lady affectionately, and took her into her arms with an awful blending of compassion in her love. She curtseyed to Lady Curtis with surprise, which did not seem very real. These two sat down, one on my lady's right hand, one on her left, surrounding her like a besieged city. My lady began to grow uneasy, began to draw back out of their range, prescient of an attack; yet to attack her together, or to have any concerted plan of operations, two people so entirely unlike each other, seemed improbable. Yet common conversation died away by common consent; everything looked suspicious: my lady drew still further back, and waited for some one to begin. This, however, was not the tactics of the enemy; the attack was meant to be gradual, and spontaneous in appearance, "springing naturally from the conversation," as Aunt Margaret might have said. "Susan is not with you; how is that? did she know you were coming?" said my lady.

"Susan is not quite at ease about this," said Miss Latimer mysteriously; "she does not know what to do, poor child! she rejected her own proper part when it was in her power, and now the common fate of a yielding woman has come upon her."

"The common fate! what do you mean?" cried my lady.

"Oh! I suppose those ridiculous election squibs," said Lady Curtis; "they'll say anything at elections; and indeed, to tell the truth, Eleanor, that is why I have come to you to-day."

"But about Susan; what has Susan to do with the election?" asked my lady in astonishment.

"They say Hugh is going to marry a mad woman," said Lady Curtis. "Hush! don't be angry: they do say so, my lady: and whose fault is it? It is because Hugh has not his mother at her post, in her own house, to refute any such slander. They will defeat your husband at his election, Eleanor, because you have left him; they will make a separation between Hugh and his future wife; and it will all be because you—you, my lady! have deserted your natural

position and left them all, father and sons, to do the best they could by themselves."

My lady drew her chair still further back, and looked at her assailant; but that ancient woman of the world had brightened to the warfare and exulted in it. "You can't divorce him," she said in those plain words which she herself, as well as other people, described as common sense, and thought irrefutable; "you can't get away from him, and be his wife no longer: you're still Lady Umphraville; you'll be Lady Umphraville all your life; your very name shows that you belong to him! You can't divorce him! What is the good of coming here, just to prove to all the world that you're separated from him? Is it for revenge?"

"My dear Eleanor," cried Miss Latimer, striking in before my lady had time to answer, "it is a shocking, unjust, abominable law; you cannot demand a divorce as a man can. When, oh when, shall woman be treated justly? But it is true: you cannot get a divorce, my poor injured friend."

"Do you know," said my lady, looking from one to the other, "that I can get protection in my own house? that I can—it's a very simple matter—go into another room, and leave you to argue the question? For me, I have no desire to enter into it: I have already told you, Lady Curtis, that, even with Sir Philip's mother, I will not discuss a matter which lies between him and me."

"All very well, Nelly, all very well, as long as you were at home and had taken no step," cried the old lady patting her daughter-in-law peremptorily on the arm. "Now the position is quite altered; you have discussed the matter, so to speak, with the whole world: everybody knows that you are not at Heathcote; you are here. You cannot make any excuse now of betraying the family secret: it is known to all who know you." With a constrained and painful smile my lady owned the logic.

"If that is the case, and I have placed myself in circumstances where I may be argued with, whether I will or no," she said—"tell me, then, what you have to say."

"What I have to say is simple," said the old lady: "you are not vindicating yourself, Eleanor; you are taking vengeance of your husband. You have made his house desolate, poor fellow! he is so domestic, so fond of female society—I dread to think what he may be driven to. You are keeping him, not only from private comfort, but from his place in society;

and, finally, if you do not exert yourself vigorously now, at the last moment, you will lose him his election. That is simply and briefly what I've got to say. *I* take the common-sense practical view of the matter. I always gave you credit for being an extremely sensible woman, my lady; as for feelings and sympathies, they are not in my way."

"And what is it that I could do now, at the last moment, to restore his seat to Sir Philip?" said my lady.

"You could go back!" cried Lady Curtis, standing up on her active old feet, and laying her brisk little hand on my lady's, as though to carry her off instantly; "the effect would be electrical: no sooner should the news be known, than Hustings would be enthusiastic. Nelly, you may never have it in your power again; pay attention to what I say!"

My lady rose, too, and stood confronting the little old worldly diplomatist before her, with her own fair, mature, dignified womanhood. She was not angry, but she was roused! her eyes sparkled a little, and the colour fluctuated on her cheek. "Do you think, Lady Curtis," she said calmly and gravely, "do you think, though you have come here on purpose to bid me, I am likely to go back?"

"I can't tell, my lady," said Sir Philip's mother, sharply; "it's impossible for me to prophesy what's *likely:* I can only tell you what's right."

"And would that be right? Should you respect a woman who left her husband, her children, her home, her life, so lightly that she could return in a few weeks?" asked my lady her colour rising. "What would *you* think of me, if I did what you say?"

"Well, Nelly, I always protested that it would be wrong for you to go away," said Lady Curtis, rather taken aback by the question; "and it is always right and praiseworthy to amend a false step," she added quickly; "therefore of course I should applaud you highly if you did it. Go back! it is your duty; you owe it to us all."

"You talk of right and of wrong, as if the heart could always stop to listen to that," said Miss Latimer; "the poor wounded woman's heart which needs, first of all, to be soothed and comforted. Eleanor, my dearest friend, I know how you feel your wrongs; a little patience is the only medicine for you. Something is to be done next session of Parliament to change these wretched laws of marriage, which press

so unequally upon men and women; and then I do not doubt you may be able to right yourself—you may be able to regain your independence beyond the reach of any annoyance. My love, the new law will grant you a divorce."

"Well," cried old Lady Curtis, sitting down with a rustle of silk and of indignation; "well, get a divorce! it is the next best thing to going back. I don't believe the law will do any such thing; but, if it does, get a divorce! then Philip, poor fellow, might be able to help himself. Your friend is right so far, Nelly: if a woman can't stay with her husband, let her do what she can to free him; but you've no power to free him; and it's far worse, I tell you—oh, yes! it's quite a spiteful woman's revenge!—to leave him bound so that he can't help himself, without a wife, and yet with one, tied up so that he must live alone or live in a way. Oh, yes! I understand it, Nelly; that's a woman's revenge." The lady made no answer; she stood looking down, with her hand resting on a little table, patting her foot upon the carpet, which was the only sign of impatience she showed; perhaps she was human enough to be pleased for the moment with the thought that she was not the only sufferer, but that Sir Philip too, in his deserted house, had found out what was the necessary penalty of insulting and forsaking his wife.

"And see how good poor Philip is," cried his mother, half feeling and half affecting an *accès* of indignation, and speaking quick to forestall Miss Latimer; "he does not interfere with you; he suffers you to go away; he does not interfere with your fortune; he lets you carry away a portion of his family: and yet you treat him as if he were a villain, as if he were too bad for a woman's society, as if you had no longer a thought concerning him, except about a divorce!"

"Hush!" said my lady; I have never spoken of a divorce: a divorce is for a man, not, at least, for a woman who has children. I do not treat him as if he were a villain; so much the contrary, that my only safeguard here, I know—do not expect to frighten me by telling me what I am aware of—is his word, and his regard for the opinion of his neighbours. He has still unlimited power of annoying, grieving, distressing me; but I did not come away from him, from my sons and their home, without considering the matter fully: I neither can return for the purpose of saving his election, nor do I wait for a new law to divorce him. Lady Curtis, if divorce would be better for Sir Philip, I cannot help it: all this is not my doing;

I might have stayed at Heathcote, keeping up a civil war, embittering our lives day by day, by a separation under the same roof. That, or coming here, was my only choice."

"Well, Nelly! and a very feasible alternative," said the old lady with animation. "I'm reasonable, though I'm his mother; I don't require you to be an angel: a woman has a right to be savage, as long as she's in her own house. As long as it's in a legitimate way, you would never find me interfere; and, if you speak of a wife's rights, I must say I think a woman has a very good right to worry her husband night and day, if he deserves it. That's inalienable—a very different thing, my lady, from leaving him alone."

"So it is," said my lady, smiling; "but —, please, as everything has been said that can be [illegible] let us go to luncheon. I fear I cannot be guided by what any one else sees right; I must still continue to do what seems right to me."

"Nelly, Nelly! I could not have believed you so obstinate, —a Dame Eleanor!—a woman of sense like you!" cried Lady Curtis; but Lady Curtis, notwithstanding, went in to luncheon, and made herself very comfortable. Miss Latimer followed, not in great spirits. The wily old lady had urged her presence to-day, thinking Miss Latimer's arguments very likely to throw my lady into violent opposition. On the contrary, she had not been at all successful, and the vivacious old stateswoman had been too quick for her, and had taken the words out of her mouth. Besides all which, Miss Latimer, who had come to have high hopes of Susan's emancipation, began now again to feel rather doubtful on the subject, and to conclude that she would have done better, had she refrained from any mention of Susan's name.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Lady Curtis left Westwood that same evening. Miss Latimer remained—remained partly for the reason that she had no immediate means of going away. She had left Susan in Norfolk with the friends whom they had gone to before Christmas; and, on her way to Westwood, had paid a flying visit to another old acquaintance, whose carriage had set her down at my lady's door. She stayed accordingly, not very much to her own satisfaction, rather afraid of entering upon the subject of

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Susan's displeasure and its cause, a matter which my lady was proportionately anxious to hear of. Miss Latimer announced mysteriously that they had heard "from various sources" of Hugh Umphraville's unfortunate engagement; that he was going to marry a crazy girl, a madwoman, a person who was subject to fits of insanity; and that everybody was horrified, except his mother, who encouraged him for some reason of her own.

"Susan bore it very badly at first," said Miss Latimer; "of course the shock was aggravated to her, by knowing that it was, in a great measure, her own fault. I cannot blame myself in any degree: I put the whole matter before her honestly; but, as she would not attend to me when the whole question was in her own hands, it is not to be wondered at that she feels now sharply the pain which she has brought on herself."

"Did she know you were coming here? did she refuse to come with you?" asked my lady.

"No, I cannot say she precisely *refused;* but she did not wish to come," said Miss Latimer; "and very naturally: why should she come here? It is not now for her own credit to continue her engagement. You have strange ideas, Eleanor; but still, surely, you must confess that a woman cannot bear the reflection that marrying her is a reproach to her betrothed."

"That depends upon who says it," said my lady; "never mind, I must inquire into it for myself. What is the matter, Evelyn?"

"Nothing, mamma; only I thought I heard a step," said Evelyn faintly.

A step outside raised as great a tremor in Evelyn's mind now, as it used to do in my lady's before Sir Philip came home.

"Poor dear Evelyn does not look well: what is it?" said Miss Latimer. "I fear all these changes have been too much for her strength, poor darling! I have seen many a young suffering creature look just the same. My love, how you start! what is the matter, dear child?"

"I heard the step again; I am sure I heard a step!" said Evelyn.

"Oh! mamma, can it be robbers?" cried Edie.

Edie was very frightened and very much excited; she pulled my lady's dress, and stretched her neck towards the window,

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where there certainly seemed some noise. They all turned to the same spot with some anxiety. At last an articulate sound came from it, which made my lady start more than Evelyn. "Mamma! oh, mamma!" cried a voice; "I'm ill! take me in; oh! take me in, mamma!"

"It's Harry!" cried the girls simultaneously. My lady sprang forward and opened the window. The poor boy was lying there quite exhausted, with heavy eyes bright with fever. He was brought in instantly to the warm room, glowing with comfort. "I'm not ill," said Harry, contradicting himself as he rolled down upon the hearthrug and leaned his head upon my lady's knee; "but I couldn't help it! it ain't my fault! Oh! my lady, don't send me away!" My lady caressed the boy's head, which sank into her lap, and bent over him with quivering lips and tears in her eyes. "What is wrong, Harry? tell me; and why did you come so late, my poor boy?" said his mother. He was reassured by her caress, and tried to look up at her; but with a face which sadly belied his statement that he was not ill. "It's only a bad cold," said Harry, bravely, "and I couldn't stand it any longer; I held out as long as I could—I did, my lady; but when it got about dark, and my head aching, and nobody in the house, and no one to care for me, I—I couldn't stand it any longer, so I came away."

"Have you walked all the way, Harry? oh! why didn't you have the pony?" cried Edie. "Mamma, may I go and tell Martha? I know what he'll have: he'll have a posset and a fire in his room, and go to bed. Oh! mamma, let me run and tell Martha: I always knew Harry would run away."

"Let me alone; I ain't going to bed! I'm going to stop with my lady," cried poor Harry, clutching his mother's gown with one hand and clinging round her waist with the other; and what with the fire, the fatigue, and the stupor of illness upon him, the poor boy fell fast asleep on his knees, with his head leaning against the soft folds of the olive satin gown. Poor Harry's patience had been oozing away day by day, and when at last he began to feel ill as well as solitary, a child's first instinct returned to the boy. He came stumbling over the Downs in the darkness, with his stupid eyes and his aching head, only one idea visible before him,—to get to his mother; yet remembering duly her last charge to him, came stealing round to the window instead of the door, meaning to go home again, poor, honest, courageous boy! if she was displeased.

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This arrival made quite a commotion in the house. My lady herself was moved quite beyond her habitual composure; the boy's entire abandonment of any sort of care for himself, as soon as he came within reach of his mother, was sufficiently touching even to a stranger: to her it was like a still more tender repetition of the infant's first unconscious appeal of helplessness. Big Harry lying with his head in her lap, worn out, sick, giving himself up unreservedly in unquestionable safety and confidence into the hands of his mother, became once more her infant, her baby, altogether her own, to my lady's motherly heart. This little incident, very opportune for Miss Latimer, saved further questions and discussions about Susan. Harry had to be got to bed, to be warmed and comforted and watched over; and, in the bustle, Miss Latimer retired to her own apartment. The next morning it turned out that the boy had been correct in describing his own sickness: it was only a bad cold; but it was a cold so bad as to be almost a fever. Perhaps it was the first time Harry had ever enjoyed being an invalid; everything seemed so full of comfort to him,—the small rooms, the new furniture, the glow of warmth and inhabitation about everything. He fell to admiring the pretty curtains and carpets, and to smoothe down my lady's dress with his hand. "It was pleasant to touch it: there was nothing soft to touch at Heathcote, not even a cat," Harry said; and the poor boy was half indignant at Edie's burst of laughter, as she asked him how he could think of a cat when he thought of mamma. He did no such thing, he protested; but everything was so cold and so hard now at home.

Next day, when he was better, Harry grew extremely communicative: he told them all about the election; how papa thought he would beat still, in spite of all they could do; and what shabby fellows the opposition were. "Do you know, mamma," said Harry, "they even speak of Susan? Oh! wouldn't Hugh be nice and pleased, if he could hear!"

"What do they say of Susan?" said my lady.

"They say she's crazy; they say she's been mad, and will be again. You should hear them at Broadmead; they pretend to know all about it there," said Harry.

"Oh! Harry; and what did you say?" cried his little sister.

"I knocked two of the fellows down," said Harry, growing red; "they didn't say it to me, and they won't again, I can tell you; they know better."

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"Who says it?" asked my lady.

Miss Latimer was in the room, lending her best attention, but taking no part: she turned now, with the slightest possible movement, to hear what the boy would say. "Lots!" said Harry; "all the old women, and that fellow at the shop, that Dissenter; he's got a brother in Hustings, and he's always telling lies about us all. But, mamma, I'll tell you who's at the bottom of it! *I* know."

"Who?"

"*That* Minnie! she's always in mischief; and doesn't she look sweet and good, and so sorry for Mr. Hugh?" cried Harry. "I've not been at old Hardwick's all this time for nothing. *I* know her; and, as sure as life, she's at the bottom of it all!"

"But, my dear, even granting that she could be so wicked, Minnie can't know anything of Susan," said my lady.

"Oh! doesn't she though!" said Harry; and Harry looked most significantly at Miss Latimer.

"If you refer to me," said Aunt Margaret, looking fixedly at my lady, whose look had followed Harry's unawares, "I did mention something of my poor Susan's unfortunate circumstances, thinking it might be a comfort to the young creature whose feelings had been so cruelly tampered with; but that she could make a dishonourable use of my communication, I cannot believe."

"What young creature? Minnie? Who has tampered with her feelings?" asked, with a smile, my lady, who thought Minnie's feelings tolerably robust, and not likely to be injured easily.

"Eleanor, you surprise me! you shock me!" cried Miss Latimer, indignantly. "By your own son; by Hugh Umphraville, who is now, I suppose, about to give up Susan as he did that poor girl; and you, his mother, encourage him in it, as if women's hearts were things to play with. Oh! Eleanor, I could not have thought it of you!"

"It seems to me this is going rather too far," said my lady, who became a little pale. She left the fire, where she had been sitting with her youngest children, and where the invalid reclined in an easy chair, and approached to the window where Miss Latimer sat,—the pleasant bay-window, where Robin Redbreast came to beg for crumbs, and from which you could see the peaceful houses of Westhampton throwing their faint curls of smoke and low lines of shadow upon the sunbright

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sea. "Take care," said Lady Umphraville; "do not make what it may be impossible to mend. You know nothing about Minnie Morris, nothing of Hugh Umphraville; the one is as incapable of trifling as the other is of being trifled with. Why, Margaret, where is your penetration, that you could not see what this girl is? I do not blame her, poor thing! but on such evidence, to blame my Hugh!" Miss Latimer turned away with a smile, shaking her head compassionately.

"My poor Eleanor, I can understand a mother's partiality," said Aunt Margaret.

Too impatient to reply, my lady rang the bell with more violence than usual, and, when it was answered, ordered her little carriage. The children besieged her with questions instantly,—where was she going? and even Evelyn lifted her eyes from her embroidery. "I thought you were going to stay with me to-day, my lady," said Harry reproachfully, with a pathetic emphasis, as though that one poor "to-day" might surely have been granted to him.

"My dear boy, I am going to Broadmead; this cannot be permitted any longer," said my lady, whereupon Harry clapped his hands.

"Hurrah! I knew she'd come to grief, if she meddled with my lady!" cried Harry. He was even pleased, in his sovereign good pleasure, to spare Edie, who was extremely desirous to go with her mother, and to accept the ministrations which Evelyn offered in her stead; for Evelyn, though she began to recover a little, was in a very pathetic state of mind, anxious to make sacrifices of any kind for anybody; and it was with quite a melancholy pleasure that she settled herself to take charge of Harry, while her little sister set forth in the sunshine, accompanying my lady and Miss Latimer on their voyage of discovery to Broadmead.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The village of Broadmead, all unconscious of my lady's proposed invasion, peacefully went about its usual occupations on that February day; peacefully, yet with a little additional excitement, for by this time it began to be known in the village that Master Harry was missing, and that the servants, though guessing easily where he had gone, expected something of an uproar on Sir Philip's return. A group of old women stood at

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a corner—at the corner of the village green, where old women were wont to stand. They were talking to each other of all the many affairs which disquieted and amused the dependants of the Umphravilles, shaking their heads over them all, and comforting themselves by the tribulations of Heathcote, which were worse, being more out of the way, than their own. Further along was the draper's shop, where the Dissenting champion lived and flourished. A bill of the arrangements of Mr. Woburn's committee lay upon the counter, and the master of the same was discoursing on various topics connected with the contest to several clients before his counter. "It's not true about Mr. Hugh. Oh! don't say so, master; I can't believe it! I knowed him since he was a baby," cried one of his customers.

"I am very sorry for it," said the village politician; "they're a depraved family. I don't know a more shamefuller history, for my part. One thing sure—every man in this parish is united on't—and my young lord had best not bring his bride here, poor unfortunate thing! Churchman and Dissenter, we're all clear on that,—if it were not them poor Tory fellows that daren't call their souls their own."

"Lord, Mr. Linsey! there ain't a Dissenter hereabout, not nearer nor Hustings, saving yourself," cried the aforesaid interlocutor.

Mr. Linsey was slightly taken aback. "The more wonder," he said, after a pause, with renewed vigour, "Churchmen are a deal more bound to the great than we are; but there's never a one in the village upholds this young sprig, and reason good! for to marry a poor cretur for her money, and her not fit to be married nor to take care of herself, goes again the grain with an Englishman: we think more of women nor that."

"Well, if it's true, it's a shame," said another of the party.

"True? let 'em deny it!" cried the draper. "Sir Philip wants his election: the worse for him, seeing he won't get it: he'd say anything; but they keep clear o' that, they do; they know better. Her fortin's handy, so they just keep quiet about the lady; that's their way. Oh! I'm up to it; but a bad man like Sir Philip shall have little say in this parish, I warrant him, as long as I'm about here."

"Oh! Mr. Linsey's churchwarden!" said somebody; "they wouldn't have done it in my young days, I can tell you,—have made a churchwarden of a Methody: folks know a deal

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better, they tell me, now-a-days; but I don't know as I sees it. And what'll ee do, master, for the church?"

"I'll save poor folks' pockets," said the shopkeeper, knowingly, a sentiment which his clients applauded. "There sha'n't be no waste of poor men's money, that ought to buy shoes and hats for the little ones, on new-fashioned benches and windows. Let them do such like that can afford it, says I: there's plenty on them; but they keep their own money in their pockets, they do, and put taxes on the likes of us. I'll see to it! there sha'n't be none of them doings at Broadmead!" After the applause excited by this sentiment had subsided, another inquirer took up the tale.

"I wonder where it first come from, for my part," said the new gossip: "I seed the young lady; she was pretty enough to look at, and never a one could have told she was out of her mind to look at her; and I'm mortal sure it never came from Heathcote, for our Sally, that's kitchen-maid there, never hear tell on it till her holiday, when she come to the village; and Sally said it was a lie, that's what she said. I'd like to hear where it come from first."

"My opinion it was out of the rectory," said one old woman.

"Truth will out: it ain't no matter where it comes from," said the draper: "it was first dropped to me in conversation, as it might be now, over the counter, as innocent as you please. A lady that was a great friend of theirs, and knew all about 'em: and she was sorry, she was, for the young cretur, as a Christian woman should, and dropped it out quite unconscious to me: she wouldn't have had it known for the world, that young lady wouldn't; but I'm a public man; I daren't lose my opportunities: it ain't for the good of the world that such things should be."

"My opinion, it was Miss from the rectory," repeated the same old woman once more.

What the brave shopkeeper might have answered never was known; for at that moment, the little crowd of women, disturbed by an exclamation of horror from one of their number, turning round beheld my lady!—my lady, standing visibly amongst them, as if she had dropped out of the skies. They all screamed with a simultaneous impulse: but, as Lady Umphraville stood between them and the door, nobody could run away. There they stood according[illegible], crowding upon each other, fearing the immediate denunciation of the wrath of their

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former patroness. On the contrary, my lady addressed them, or, at least, two or three among them, with all her old kindness, asking about the husbands and the children, as though she had never left home. It was not in the nature of the village mind to be thus addressed, without thinking upon various little grievances, which might as well be communicated while there was time.

"I can't come to you as I used to do," said Lady Umphraville, very graciously; "but I hope soon to have a young representative, who will do better than I could. Do you know my son is going to be married? I think I heard you all talking about it when I came in." A rustle of guilt, of dismay, of consternation, passed through the little assembly. Had a sudden burst of lightning blazed among them they could not have been more discomfited: even the shopkeeper bit the end of his measure, and turned pale. With the most smiling confidence my lady went on:—"I am sure you will all be glad when I tell you—for you used to be very good friends to Heathcote, I know, and to wish us all well—that she's a very dear young creature, and will make a better mistress to Heathcote than has been there for many a day; and that I think my son is very happy to get such a wife."

"I'm glad to hear on't," cried the old woman, abruptly; "but she'll never be like you, my lady."

"She has a great deal more sense than I had at her years," said my lady, who was as gracious as a queen; "and you'll all like her very much. I know I shall have no chance, in comparison with my daughter-in-law, when she has been here a year. Mr. Linsey, I have a little commission for you."

Amazed, fluttered, discomposed, the little covey of gossips took wing as my lady approached the counter. They all fled, save the old woman, who lingered outside the door. My lady sat down with the most perfect affability, and gave the draper some orders, looking at various things which she asked for with exemplary patience, and making a considerable purchase. Then, glancing round to see that they were alone, she came diplomatically to the object of her visit. "I am surprised at a man of your good sense, Mr. Linsey," said my lady, reproachfully——

"Ma'am! my lady!" cried the unfortunate shopkeeper.

"Yes," proceeded my lady, gravely; "I am astonished to think that a man of your good sense, and experience of the world, should lend your assistance so easily to a false report."

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"Madam!" exclaimed the new churchwarden, making an effort to vindicate himself, "I'm an independent man; I'm a man of independent principles: I'm not bound to any family: I speak my mind wherever I may be."

"So much the worse for you," said my lady, "when you speak what is not your mind, but merely a malicious falsehood, which you've no means whatever to prove. This is not speaking your mind: you know quite well that you don't know anything about it in your own person; and that is what makes me surprised at you, a man of your good sense and discretion. As for the village gossips, it is quite natural; but I must own I am surprised at *you*——"

The unfortunate linen-draper was struck dumb by the exquisite flattery of these reproaches. He had not a word to say for himself. The British Lion is not only one of the most honestly gallant of all animals, but a brute accessible to reason. The new churchwarden hung his head, and did not know how to answer. "I assure you, my lady, I had good authority: I had no doubt it was a true report," he stammered, not knowing very well what he said.

"Ah! Mr. Linsey, you don't see what I mean: that is exactly what I am surprised at," said my lady. "How a man with a sound judgment, like you, should help to spread a report which you only had upon somebody else's authority, and did not *personally know* to be true, that is what astonishes me: but we won't say any more about it. By-and-bye you shall see my future daughter-in-law, and I know you'll agree with me, that she's not only one of the prettiest, but the very most sensible young lady in Sussex. Put up my parcel, and send some one down with it to the rectory gate; you'll see my pony carriage there: I am going to the rectory. Good-bye, Mr. Linsey, and I'm sure you won't forget what I say." So my lady went away radiant and smiling, like a queen out of a conquered kingdom; and the linen-draper looked after her with open mouth and bewildered looks. "Electioneering!" he said to himself, by-and-bye, making an effort to recover himself; but it was clear he did not believe his own suggestion. He put up the parcel in utter silence, without saying a word to anybody, and, despatching his shop-boy with it, stood at the door and watched him deliver it safely to [redacted]y's man. My lady's man now-a-days was not the splen[redacted]vidual he used to be, neither was her little carriage [redacted]e equipages of Heathcote. The draper went in to his business, still very

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quiet, and feeling the difference; and the British Lion roared no more over Hugh Umphraville's love story; at least, not in the village of Broadmead. Miss Hardwick, Miss Clarissa, and Minnie, were seated together in that long low drawing-room of the rectory, where the same three individuals were introduced to the reader, in the early pages of this history. There was very little difference apparent among them, though that was near a year since. Miss Hardwick had either never finished her knitting, or had begun another piece precisely similar; Miss Clarissa mended her lace in the same chair, with the same footstool under her feet; while Minnie did everything with an air of doing nothing, peculiar to herself, and had a bit of work ready in the pocket of her apron, to begin in a moment whenever she had time. They were talking about the all-engrossing subjects, which were not likely to wear out, until, at least, the Hustings election was over. "Sir Philip will come in," said Miss Hardwick; "it's all very well to speak of public opinion. Public opinion don't interfere with people's votes, not the first time, take my word for it. Indignation's very pretty, but it's easiest to do what one's used to do: there hasn't been time enough to work people up to that point. Oh, dear, no! Sir Philip's sure to come in."

"I am sure I hope you are correct," said Miss Clarissa; "for of course Sir Philip is our candidate, though, in a moral point of view, I can't at all approve of him. Really, I do think my lady has a good deal to answer for: there would have been none of this opposition if she had not gone away."

"My lady was a deal too good to him," cried Miss Hardwick. "Odd, now, this story about that silly boy, Hugh. I wonder if a bird of the air carried the matter, eh? I'm a believer in human agency, myself. Please not to look so spiteful, Minnie! Who got up the story, should *you* think?"

"It must have been Miss Latimer," said Minnie, demurely. One can tell a truth sometimes, so as to answer all the purposes of a lie: this was a fact, of which Minnie was perfectly aware.

"Miss Latimer? Well! some people have a natural turn for mischief," said Miss Hardwick. "It's all a great story, you know, every word of it: rude people would call it a lie."

"Shocking! Don't let me hear such a word," cried Miss Clarissa; "and I don't see, for my part, why it should not be true,—one never can tell. If one only knew, even among one's own friends, the most unlikely things are always happening; for my part, I am always ready to believe what I hear."

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"When it is an evil report," said Miss Hardwick, "that's tempting, I confess: but I rather wonder now how my lady could have let it go so far."

At this moment the door opened, and my lady herself, Miss Latimer, and Edie, were ushered into the room. Their arrival at this precise moment was rather confusing to the rectory ladies: they had to get up quite a flutter of welcome and delighted surprise, to carry off their embarrassment. My lady, however, did not intend that their embarrassment should wear off: she addressed Miss Hardwick, instantly, as soon as they were seated. "Now, tell me why you wondered that I should have let it go so far."

"It? what?" cried Miss Hardwick in dismay.

"Oh! all the election gossip," cried Minnie, losing her self-possession for the moment, and interfering in an agony of terror. "It is such good fun to hear all the nonsense they talk about politics and bills and that sort of thing, people who know nothing at all about them;" and Minnie laughed.

It was not a pleasant laugh, for Minnie had already begun to get frightened at the extent of her operations, and to tremble with fears of retribution. My lady did not look at her, but her aunts did sharply, quite resenting her interference. "Thank you, I can answer for myself; I am obliged to you," said Miss Hardwick: "I understand my lady. Well, Lady Umphraville, it *is* all a pack of nonsense, as I have just been saying—this, you know, about Hugh's engagement—eh? you've heard it as well as me."

"But of course Lady Umphraville must know *we* never put any faith in it," said Miss Clarissa.

"Thank you, what was it?" said my lady.

"My dear Eleanor, what is the use of all this mystery?" cried Miss Latimer; "these ladies know poor Susan's affliction—you know they do; unfortunately now every one knows it. It is a thing to be regretted; but talking and making quite an affair of it, will do no good: such matters are far better kept quiet. I am sure the Miss Hardwicks, who know life, will agree with me."

"Then it is true?" cried Miss Clarissa eagerly. Miss Hardwick opened her eyes, and Minnie, who had been getting very nervous, grew steady in a moment. How delightful! the guilt was lifted off *her* shoulders at once. She breathed freely; she even ventured to look at my lady, who smiled and looked perfectly undisturbed, whatever her private sentiments might be.

"Yes, it very melancholy," said my lady. "Susan's father had a cousin who lost his wits in India, poor fellow! not unlike that unfortunate relative of yours, Miss Clarissa, whom you had at the rectory two years ago. Poor Dick Mitford! I remember him very well; he seemed a very fine gentleman indeed to us in the country. It was a misfortune to him, poor fellow! without doubt; but I think that is the last point in Miss Latimer's genealogical tree. Ah! what did you say? who is coming? Hugh? impossible!" Minnie had gone to look out, hearing a hasty step in the garden, and there, hurried, haggard, impatient, a man in desperate haste, careless of every obstacle, came Hugh Umphraville. What did it mean?

CHAPTER XL.

"MOTHER!" cried Hugh, looking in at the door, "I want you!" He bowed to them all round with a hurried, preoccupied gesture: he neither knew nor cared if they thought him rude; his mind was entirely possessed with one object; he even thrust aside Edie with his hand when she came up to him. "Mother!" he repeated with vehemence, "I want *you*." Full of a hundred apprehensions, my lady rose; she thought that something had happened to Sir Philip, that some mysterious calamity had befallen Hugh. Strangely enough, she did not connect his hasty appearance with the matter of which she had just been speaking. She made a hurried apology to Miss Hardwick, and followed her son. "Go into the study," cried the good-humoured sister. Hugh had not waited for permission; already he had entered at the first open door, and stood beckoning his mother impatiently: she hurried after him breathless.

"Hugh! your father! what is wrong?" cried my lady. The young man stared at her with astonishment, closed the door hastily, and came up to her. His father! no one was farther from his thoughts.

"Mother! I want you to come with me instantly, as you value my happiness,—my life!" cried Hugh. "I was already half way there, when I turned back for you: *I* cannot bring her away. Mother, is it necessary to return to Westwood? can you not send a message to Evelyn, and go on with me?"

"Where?" cried my lady.

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"Where? have I not told you? Look here," said Hugh, taking out a letter; "I have no occasion to keep it from you: Heaven knows, she does not say a word which she might not say to a stranger; she has no love to waste upon me. See what she says: she has cast me off as easily—— Read it, read it before I grow wild! Look, mother, what she says." My lady took the letter, and the young man went away to the long narrow dim window to pluck off the leaves of the rector's favourite plant which stood there, and to pace up and down, muttering to himself. My lady read the letter; and it is possible that she too for a moment forgot everything but indignation—anger, that any one should write so to *her* son; for this was Susan's letter:—

"DEAR HUGH,

"I FEAR I have been wrong; I fear we have both been wrong: everybody else seems to know so much better. I begin to be convinced that I should bring nothing but evil to you, for every one says so; and even you, they tell me, by this time must have regretted your foolishness, and must think of your engagement only as a bondage upon your honour. I free you accordingly. Be free, Hugh; love some one else; marry some one else. Do not let a single thought, even of compassion, remain with me. I shall not ask to be pitied; but as it seems I ought to have done this long ago at Heathcote, I should like to do it now effectually. Don't write to me; pray don't think of coming! My lady and everybody will be much better pleased, and you yourself, I do not doubt, in the end will be far happier—and, I suppose, so shall I. Always your friend,

"SUSAN MITFORD."

My lady could scarcely restrain an indignant exclamation as she closed the letter. "I could not have believed it; I could not have dreamed of anything like this from Susan. My poor boy, it is cruel! heartless!" cried my lady.

Hugh started violently, and held up his hand. "Don't say so; she has been persecuted, *worried* into it—and that woman is with you now!" exclaimed Hugh. "Can you come with me? will you come, mother, at once, without going home?"

"Hugh, I am angry—I don't think she deserves your devotion, a girl who could write like this to my son," said my lady. "Hugh! hush! she ought not to have done it; nobody could have forced her: it is ungenerous. She is not like

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you." At the moment while my lady spoke, she heard a kind of long-drawn sob behind the door. It was not grief; it was a deep breath of satisfaction, carefully restrained yet audible. She did not listen to what Hugh said; she made one rapid step to the door, and opened it. Was it Miss Latimer? There was but one person in the hall, and that was Minnie, who was passing out by the back way into the garden, with a basket in her hand, looking perfectly unconscious, yet red as a peony. My lady followed her rapidly, and laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder. "Did you hear what I said?" she asked. Minnie faltered, held down her head, grew redder and redder: "No."

My lady grasped her shoulder till it ached. "Minnie, what motive have you? I know it is you!" exclaimed Lady Umphraville, with sudden conviction.

When Minnie heard that, she stood erect and made a curtsey to her assailant. "Thank you, my lady," said the accused; "but you hurt me!" and Minnie withdrew her shoulder, and glided out at the garden door like a little queen. Hugh's mother went back to him, somewhat disturbed in her mind. Was she correct? had she made a false accusation? My lady did not like the idea of being in the wrong. "Now, Hugh, I am ready to go," she said when she re-entered the study; but Hugh, instead of asking where she had been, had fallen into an angry apathy.

"I swore I would never trust man nor woman again, if she failed me," he said to himself; and then, as if repeating something, "'She is of a sweet, mild disposition; she will not feel anything very much.' Is it true?"

"Is what true?" said his mother.

Hugh laughed as he rose to his feet; but my lady did not like the sound. "Anything, everything!" he cried; "this letter—you—me—all the world! *I* can't tell. Never mind, let us go and see; I will not give in at the first blow." And Hugh marched out of the room before his mother, and was bitterly polite to Miss Latimer, whom he insisted on conducting to the carriage. Minnie had come round by the side of the house, and met them as they passed out. Hugh, in his momentary bravado, stopped to speak to her; he said something rudely complimentary, as unlike himself as possible, and, laughing again, went on with Miss Latimer to the carriage. To my lady, who came slowly after with a troubled face, Minnie made a curtsey of triumph and defiance. She watched them

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drive away with a curious mixture of elation, shame, and self-contempt. This, which sufficed to make Hugh Umphraville miserable, to disturb my lady deeply, to upset all the comfort of Westwood for the time being, and, though last, not least important, to move Susan Mitford the length of rejecting and casting off her betrothed lover;—all this was Minnie's doing: she looked upon the mischief with a certain triumph; it might even turn the scale of the Hustings election, and throw Sir Philip out. To work such great results was something to be proud of; but Minnie blushed and moved away very quickly from the gate when the thought occurred to her by what means they had been accomplished; for, though she had a natural knack for mischief in general, and a particular intuition of malice in the present instance, Minnie was not thoroughly wicked: she had still the grace to blush, and to blush for herself.

When Minnie went in to her aunts, who were discussing the private disclosures which Miss Latimer had made to them, and considerably disappointed to find that it was only her family, and not Susan who were reputed crazy, Minnie found a letter for herself lying on a side table. Strange freak of fortune! it had come while she was listening to my lady's indignation against Susan. Minnie took it up, and, seeing the hand-writing was strange to her, took it to her own room to read, little thinking that here was enough to turn all her successful plans into snares for her troubled feet. She took up the letter to that little attic bedchamber of hers, with the low window, the sloping roof, the plain painted furniture. It was rather cold here without a fire, so she put a shawl round her: everything was chilly; the painted set of drawers from which she took her shawl felt clammy and damp in this apartment, where there never was a fire. Some great leaves of ivy flapped clamorously against the window. "Comfortable!" said Minnie to herself, shrugging her shoulders. Somehow, the dismal humility of everything around her once more warmed her triumph: though she was here, so poor, so neglected; though Mr. Hugh Umphraville had never made love to *her* as he ought to have done; though she was still only a dependant upon the rector, unable to help anybody—still there was comfort in it. It was she who had scattered firebrands among all these prosperous people; she who had made Susan Mitford's heart beat high with mortified and disappointed affection; she who had startled Hugh into this desperate journey; she who had alarmed and disturbed my lady with

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the saddest apprehensions for her son. Minnie smiled once more, and as she smiled she opened her letter; but the smile soon faded in a press of other emotions: she blushed, she grew pale, she bowed her head over the full page, she threw off her shawl, she clenched her vacant hand so tightly that the joints of her fingers grew white with the strain; and, when she had ended, looked up with a face aghast, so white and panic-stricken, that you must have thought she had heard some terrible news, to look at her face.

What was the letter? It was nothing terrible; it was a letter full of love—which Minnie deserved as little as the vilest in the world—full of respect, anxiety, fervour, a young man's heart: it was the offer of an honest man's love and home and fortune. One might have supposed that the pleasure of the conquest, if merely to reject it, would have had a very contrary effect upon Minnie: but that must be a very bad heart which gets loved without deserving it, and is not somewhat awed and startled by the gift. This frank, honourable, and plain-speaking affection surprised Minnie, in the midst of her malice, with a shock greater than discovery: she blushed crimson when she remembered what thoughts this sudden messenger had interrupted; but that was not the worst. What made her face aghast and her heart almost cease beating for the time, was the thought that, even at the moment of receiving this, some one had acquired the power of blighting all her prospects: just when this new world was about to open before her feet, my lady had found out her private schemes, and was enabled to cover her with confusion if she pleased. No wonder that the cold dew came out upon her forehead, and that she threw from her, almost passionately, the shawl which still hung about her knees. Susan Mitford! Hugh Umphraville! what did Minnie care about these children now? yet, just as she ceased to care, their names became names of terror. They could expose her malicious devices; they could show her tampering with other people's happiness, spreading evil reports, making false additions to the tale which had been entrusted to her in confidence. Half an hour ago, Minnie would have laughed at the idea of any harm coming from my lady's discovery; but it was different—great results might hang upon it now! For this, as it happened, was what people call "a very advantageous offer." Perhaps Minnie knew in her heart by this time that Hugh Umphraville had always been as unlikely to fall in love with her as she to fall in love with him; and this

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bird in the hand was worth a hundred problematical warblers in the bush. It was not a young squire or a baronet's heir who laid his possessions at Minnie's feet; it was Mr. Manifold, the rising young architect of Gothic fame already mentioned in these pages, who was a man of some family and a little wealth, in addition to his professional eminence. But when Minnie permitted herself to look at the pleasurable side, she did not think first of the lover: she thought of the pretty little house, possibly in St. John's Wood; of the perfect composure of the architect's wife, who knew her own position, in the presence of all these great people, none of whom could then disturb her entire independence; of the children in Baker Street, who could be sent to school, some of them, and who might have a great many holidays and presents and pleasures through the intervention of their married sister; even of the nice professional man's brougham and plentiful moderate income, which would make the beginning of this new life so extremely comfortable; and then, with a passing blush, Minnie thought of Mr. Manifold. Well! she did not care particularly about him just at that moment; but she assured herself he should have the brightest house, the best wife, the most cheerful fireside in England. She glanced round upon her mean little room, and shrugged her shoulders; and insensibly there rose before her a picture, a very different picture,—the house, which would most likely be in St. John's Wood, the pretty rooms, the dutiful servants, the brougham at the door, the importance of the little personage who should rustle out of the warm drawing-room into the cozy carriage, and bid John drive to Mr. Manifold's office, to bring her admiring prime minister and principal servitor home to dinner. Oh, fairy vision! but once more Minnie clasped her hand tight, and once more cold drops stood upon her forehead. Upon the threshold of this felicity stood the angry figure of my lady. My lady, if she pleased, might turn the whole into bitterness and shame.

CHAPTER XLI.

Meanwhile, totally oblivious of Minnie, thinking no more about her after that discovery, which was a private satisfaction to her own mind, but which she had no thought of using against the young schemer, my lady travelled eastward with her son. Susan was in Norfolk. They had first returned

to Westwood in spite of Hugh's impatience; then, having arranged matters there, had hastened from Westwood to Brighton, and from Brighton to London. At this point Hugh would no longer be controlled: he would not rest all night in town, as my lady did; he would hurry on, to be there by peep of day—to be ready, without losing a moment, to present himself to Susan. My lady remonstrated, even laughed at him. "You should look your best instead of your worst," she said; "do you remember how people look who have travelled all night?" But Hugh, perfectly inaccessible to reason, was even beyond the reach of ridicule. He saw his mother settled comfortably in the hotel which she was accustomed to use; then he jumped into a Hansom, and drove off frantically to that mysterious and indescribable locality from whence people start for the Eastern Counties. My lady looked after him with smiles and sighs, with a mother's half grudge at his readiness to leave her, after having hurried her on so far under the impulse of his young eager will, yet with a natural approbation of the young man's ardour, which *was* natural and right. So Hugh bowled away down to Norfolk through the winter night, and my lady took what sleep she could in her unfamiliar quarters; and neither of them spent a single thought upon the discomfited agent of all the mischief, nor once occupied themselves with any counter-plan of social revenge.

Unaware of the approaching invasion—perhaps, if she ever thought of such a chance, setting herself against it with an obstinate little pride of her own, which, when once roused, was hard enough to master—Susan did her best to sleep, that night, without thinking of anything: but this was not so easy to manage as one might have supposed. Certain kinds of thoughts are wonderfully intrusive and persistent: perhaps Susan could not help wondering what Hugh would do, what my lady would say, and how, after this wonderful convulsion, the world was to go on calmly and regularly, as if nothing had happened. For her own part, she could not help feeling a considerable disgust for most things about her, especially for the amusements which were professedly for her exclusive benefit, and longing, with the deep longing of a young mind hurt and wounded, to go home. Even about this she had taken her own steps, without saying anything to anybody; however, it was certain that for a day or two nothing was to be done, save wait, which Susan accordingly bent her mind to do with as

good a grace as possible; not refusing to share the pleasures of her fellows—not refusing even to set out with them on a day's excursion, to visit somebody at a distance, for which the misguided party chose, of all the days in the year, *this* day. Accordingly it happened that when my lady arrived, late in the afternoon, at the little station which was nearest to Susan's present abode, she found, not only a post-chaise waiting her, but her son, pale with watching, anxiety, and passion. Hugh was in an abominable humour; he had arrived just before daybreak, at that hour when everything is damp and dismal, and when the cold penetrates, not only to the bone, but to the heart—and temper, when the last-named organ is delicate. Then, in the dark, over a country road which he did not know, and which seemed to have been rained on for a week previously, he had to walk two miles to a poor little roadside inn, where the people were not half awake, yet were sufficiently in their senses to be half afraid of so singularly early a traveller; from whence poor Hugh, having made his toilette and swallowed a cup of bad coffee, and waited until a decent hour, set off—four miles this time—to see the lady of his love. When, lo! Susan was from home, gone out with a party, not expected to return till evening. Can anybody wonder, after all these aggravations, that Hugh's temper was very much the reverse of amiable; that he jumped into the chaise beside his mother, fell back into his corner, and scarcely addressed a word to her during all these dreary long six miles before they reached their journey's end. "Really, Hugh, I scarcely know how to introduce myself," said my lady, as they drew near the house.

"I shall ask for *her*," said Hugh. "Do you need to see the people of the house? You know better than I do, mother: I don't mind anything but seeing Susan." Which was so far true, that it soon became apparent he did not care much for his mother's nerves or his own safety; for, seeing something, a passing figure in the grounds, which struck his fancy as being like Susan, he threw the door of the carriage open suddenly, and jumped out while they were still at full speed. "I'll join you instantly," he cried; and accordingly he returned in about three seconds, once more disappointed and rather more savage than before. They were now close to the door; he made my lady alight and take his arm, and she found him trembling with excitement and expectation. Yes, they had returned; Susan was there. They were shown into a large drawing-room, half lighted, where nobody was visible. The

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party had but just returned, and had dispersed to their own apartments to prepare for dinner. Presently they heard voices approaching. "A gentleman, who has been here three times to-day, asking for Miss Mitford, and now a lady with him; have you any idea who can they be?" said the voice of the mistress of the house, who came into the dim room with a light in her hand, unaware, and not perceiving in the darkness that the visitors were here. By her side came Susan in a riding-dress, with the bloom of exercise and fresh air upon her cheek, looking, by the light of that candle, happier and brighter almost than they had ever seen her. Unconsciously to himself, Hugh gave a sharp cry "Ah!" which sounded very like the pang it expressed; it struck him like a blow to see her looking so well, so bright, so unclouded. The lady of the house was frightened; she cried out too, and held up her candle. Hugh did not wait, but hurried forward in the darkness, and seized Susan's hand.

"Who should it be but I? you knew that!" cried the young man. "Susan! Susan! how dared you to write to me so? what right had you? Can people give their word, and draw it back again when they please? are faith and love things to play with? Nay! let everybody hear; you are mine! you cannot throw me aside when you are displeased. Susan, you hear me! I will never give you up—never, by Heaven!—till you tell me that you love some one else better than me!"

Susan, who had tried to disengage her hand at first, and looked resentful, by this time became agitated. "Hugh, let me go!" she cried; "you should not speak to me so, not here; it was all true. Oh, my lady! let me go to my lady; she knows what is best for us;" and Susan drew her hand away, and fled, with a motion so rapid that it was indeed actual flight, to my lady, who had advanced to the little group, fantastically illuminated by that one candle.

Susan's hostess looked on all the while, holding it, with an almost ludicrous expression of bewilderment. My lady addressed her first. "I must beg you to pardon us all," she said: "I am Lady Umphraville; this is my son. These two young people, as I trust you have heard, have been engaged to each other for several months—and they have disagreed. Will you pardon us? Susan, my dear child, you must not cling to me."

"Do *you* disapprove of me, my lady?" said Susan, clinging no longer, but standing up erect by Lady Umphraville's side, her pride roused and her agitation calmed for the moment.

"Yes," said my lady, with a momentary smile; "and Hugh has a right to ask you for an explanation. Susan, speak to Hugh: you know why I am with him; but the question does not lie with me."

Susan hesitated a moment, then looked at Mrs. Lowestoff. "May we go?" she said, blushing, yet looking more proud than ashamed. Then she stepped aside into a little boudoir, the door of which was open, and remained so. Hugh followed her; and Mrs. Lowestoff, setting down her candle on the table, turned round, with a comic look, to my lady.

"I never knew, I assure you, the literal meaning of holding a candle before," cried the good-humoured mistress of the house, sitting down with an expression of weariness. "You are very welcome, Lady Umphraville; now pray tell me all about it."

Which my lady did with the most perfect plainness and without any circumlocution, and which was received with great indignation, horror, and sympathy by the kind-hearted Norfolk woman. "I have thought her looking out of spirits for a week or two," said Mrs. Lowestoff; "I know she made an effort to-day, for the sake of our young people, who are very fond of her; but now, pray, if you will not think me impertinent—pray, my dear Lady Umphraville, why did you say that she knew why you were here?"

My lady slightly evaded the question. "I have come, if I can, to carry her away," she said.

"Oh! that is quite a different matter," said Mrs. Lowestoff, changing countenance; "our young people are very fond of her. Ah! I think she has been very happy here. Really, it is so sudden; but suppose Miss Mitford should not go?"

"You think I take a great deal upon me," said my lady, "as much as her own mother might do; but her grandmother is a very old friend of mine, and has confidence in me. My name has been mixed up in this; I have to vindicate myself: I trust Susan will go."

"Oh, indeed! really I had no idea there was anything so serious," cried Susan's new friend, growing rather stately. "Perhaps you will be good enough to excuse me, Lady Umphraville; our dinner-hour is close at hand: I dread to hear the bell. You will join us, of course; we shall be delighted,—Miss Mitford's friends——"

"Thank you," said my lady, interrupting her; "do not let me detain you. I have been travelling all day; we shall be gone presently—pray forgive our intrusion. Good night."

And Mrs. Lowestoff was comforted to get rid of them, though her conscience smote her: she went away with a compunction, and had two minds to come back and persuade her unexpected guests to remain. However, she did not come back; but left my lady in the great dim drawing-room, with the candle which had played so important a part in this little dramatic interlude standing on the table. My lady, too, began to dread hearing the bell, and discovered that it would be very ridiculous to be found sitting here, waiting till the lovers in the boudoir had finished their quarrel, when the party assembled before dinner. She went to seek the young people accordingly. Susan was crying, but did not seem to be melted; as for Hugh, he was walking up and down, addressing her with excitement, telling her she would drive *him* mad, that she had no right to hold her word and troth so lightly, and that he never would relinquish her—never, by heaven!—until she gave him the only reason which could induce a man to give up his bride.

"And that is——?" cried Susan.

"That is," said Hugh, growing calm with the emergency, "that there is some one else whom you prefer to me—that you were mistaken—that you have found that your heart clings to another. Tell me this, and I will stand aside; but for any less reason, never, Susan, never!" And Susan, surprised and aggravated out of all her old premeditations of reply, finding the ground totally changed, and herself—not Hugh—put in the wrong, from sheer vexation at finding nothing to say, cried, yet tried to hide that she was crying. It was at this point that my lady came up to the door.

"My dear children," she said, "you must not look foolish before these strangers: they are coming to dinner presently. You will be obliged to postpone your explanation; we shall have to go away: and, Hugh, my dear boy, Susan will see you to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Hugh, in dismay (poor Susan, though she would not say a word for pride, could almost have echoed it); "why to-morrow?"

"Because—indeed because I had much rather that my son and my daughter did not look foolish to-night," said my lady: "here are lights coming; and presently a whole houseful of people, dressed for dinner, will surprise us in our travelling dress, and Susan in tears. Nobody must smile at Susan, for your sake; and indeed, my dear boy, I had much rather that no one saw *you* to-night."

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This skilful maternal wile called Susan's eye to Hugh with apprehension; and Hugh looked as ill as a man who has travelled all night and waited all day might naturally be expected to look. This is sometimes excellent policy in a lover: Susan was moved immediately.

"Good-night, Hugh," she said quite tenderly, holding out her hand to him. "My lady is right: all these people are coming; they are strangers, they would only laugh at us. Good night, Hugh, and—and—I will see you *soon* to-morrow." As at this moment some one actually entered the drawing-room, Hugh was compelled to yield; he went away with anything but a good grace. "He travelled all yesterday and all last night," whispered my lady, as she too said good-night. And Susan escaped to her own room, to cry a good deal more by herself, to send an apology to Mrs. Lowestoff for not appearing that evening, and to occupy herself with making answers to Hugh's unanswerable proposition, yet all the while with a secret comfort in the thought that it was no longer necessary. Though she cried, the old happiness hovered fluttering over her heart, ready to come back again; while Hugh, on the contrary, driving my lady back to the mean little inn where they were to spend the night, would have liked to lash the poor old horses into a gallop in the impatience of his spirit. Alas! Hugh had to be content to go at a snail's pace and wait till to-morrow. Such is life!

CHAPTER XLII.

The interview of the next day was very long, very interesting, —rather agitating, indeed, to tell the truth; but it was a lovers' interview, a thing which belongs to everybody's imagination. The conclusion was, however, so far satisfactory, that Susan withdrew her hasty judgment, and that the two together amicably burnt, at her desire, the letter containing it. Notwithstanding, things were not so fair as they should have been, after this storm. Hugh, who did not know Susan's aggravations, expected more contrition than the young lady was disposed to show; and Susan, who had a great deal too much sense to enjoy a lovers' quarrel, could not help asking herself whether there might not be a risk of such things occurring again, and felt the first sanctity of their confidence in each other disturbed and broken. Then came my lady, later in the

afternoon, to propose that Susan should go back with her to Westwood. My lady had good reasons for doing so; still perhaps it was not quite the most judicious step in the world, just at this time. Susan's pride quite rose against the proposal: she thought it looked like carrying her home, a naughty child, to be out of harm's way; she thought it unkind of my lady to wish for such a demonstration of her triumph.

"No," said Susan: "I wrote to John Anthony; I told him to tell grandmamma I wished to come home. I did not write to grandmamma, because it would have grieved her; but I told him to say that he had heard I was not happy, and she was to send for me home."

"And all this, Susan, without saying a word to me?" said my lady, who was alone with her in Susan's own room.

"Yes; I could not complain to you," answered Susan, steadily: "I wished to go home, and so I do still. John Anthony should write to-day. Let me go to grandmamma; I shall be better at home."

"John Anthony will come; he never writes," said my lady; "but, my dear child, you were going to London, and you were coming to Westwood to see my new house and poor Evelyn. Evelyn is ill, Susan: I cannot tell what is the matter with her; I have been depending on you."

"Oh! no, my lady, let me go home!" cried Susan, much disposed to cry again; but this time, because she began to fear her mind was getting very changeable, because her heart yearned to Westwood and poor Evelyn, touched on the right point; and because still, in spite of all vexations, it was pleasanter to be near Hugh than far away from him. So Susan, seized with new impulses, antagonistic and self-contradictory, which had never before troubled her spirit, became very much ashamed and vexed with herself, and anxious to keep to her resolution at all hazards. John Anthony fulfilled my lady's predictions: he was not at all in the habit of writing, when coming would answer as well, or better; he brought with him, not an authority to carry Susan home, but a letter from Grandmamma Mitford to my lady, begging her to look after the poor child. Grandmamma would have been heartily glad to receive her darling home again; but she was an old-fashioned old lady, thought that young people should not be encouraged to change their minds, and did not take alarm at the thought of her child's discomfort, until she had first appealed to "Eleanor." For Mrs. Mitford had an old woman's

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admiration and confidence in my lady, whose "principles" were very like her own, but who had a stronger mind to carry them out than grandmamma ever had, and was, moreover, young in *her* eyes, and capable of anything. So Susan, referred on every side to my lady, had to yield to her own inclinations very unwillingly; and, by way of revenging herself on herself for being glad to go to Westwood, went with a worse grace than she had ever gone anywhere before, was decidedly disagreeable to Hugh, and displeased with John Anthony, who accompanied them on their further journey. John Anthony smiled grimly at his new occupation.

"Ay, my lad, better late than never," said the Northumbrian, "and I would not say but, on the whole, it was safer to have the charge of young ladies in a man's later days than in his former—an' it were not that both you and me are out of favour. Eh, canny man, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," said Hugh abruptly. "Foster, sometimes I've been a beast to you as well as to everybody else; will you do me a good turn?"

"Ay, my lad; anything in the world for your mother's son," said Foster. "You're no wiser than mortal at any time; but what was the beast business? I don't call it to mind."

"Why that very last time in the library!" cried Hugh. "Well, if you don't recollect, so much the better for me," he added in a tone of subdued mortification. "Foster, I wish you would see Sir Philip for me."

"Sir Philip—your father, eh! what's this about?" cried Foster.

"I'll tell you another time," answered the oracular Hugh.

John Anthony, however, was not so easily diverted. In the intervals of the journey, he managed to find out that Hugh's great anxiety now was to be married, and that his own mission to Sir Philip was to be upon this important subject: it was one which Hugh would not enter upon with his father, neither was he disposed to entrust it to a stranger. In his own person, he would hear no reason. Delay was of no use whatever, unless it were to please Susan, and Hugh did not think it advisable to gratify Susan at such a risk. "They'll tell her all sorts of tales again, and set her against us," he said, which was not at all unlikely: "and as for Oxford, I'm too old. What good does taking his degree do to a country gentleman? All very well for Rothes, who will have a profession; but look here, Foster;" and Hugh produced a mystical scrap of paper, on

which his own ideas on the subject of settlements had been indicated; "I went to see our solicitor," he said, with a blush, in answer to John Anthony's smile of surprise. And Hugh was so much in earnest, that Foster was moved to acquiescence, moved to the length of undertaking the commission, though he did not much admire it. The two became great friends and very confidential, as they went along in attendance upon my lady and Susan, which latter personage was ungracious to both of them. Hugh, when his heart was opened, was very glad to make a confidant of Foster, to talk to him till the listener was tired, of Susan, whom John Anthony had known since she was a baby, and who consequently could not be much of a princess of romance to his accustomed eyes. Notwithstanding, John Anthony, who was an old bachelor, and (perhaps) had never been in love, loved to hear the youth talk, his own heart being fresh within him, as solitary hearts sometimes have the gift to be; though an awful doubt of his own wisdom in undertaking the embassy to Sir Philip sometimes came across his mind, and made him twist his mouth and shrug his shoulders. Sir Philip had never been a favourite with John Anthony; he feared a little for his own temper, when he should find himself in the presence of my lady's unfaithful husband: and, when they came to their journey's end, Foster looked at himself in the glass in the guest-chamber at Westwood, and made a wry face. "Ay, canny man, what made you take it in hand?" said John Anthony; but the canny man, thus apostrophised, made no articulate answer; so the Northumbrian went to sleep upon it, resolved to make the best he could of an unpalatable business, which was generally his way of managing the hard things in this life.

CHAPTER XLIII.

While my lady was gone, seeking Susan, while Miss Latimer sat in her own apartment, writing to various of her friends interesting descriptions of Susan's case, while even Miss Banks questioned Edie in the school-room about this much-mentioned name,—Evelyn, wandering out, lonely and by herself, fell upon the climax of her youthful fate. She was on the beach, walking slowly, thinking; on the winterly beach, where no one was walking but herself, and where no one could see her,—quietly, all by herself, recovering out of her fever-fit of dreaming. At

least, poor Evelyn thought she was recovering: she was in the benevolent phase of the malady. She was eager to be good to everybody, to deny herself, to make sacrifices; *that*, after all, Evelyn thought, in the pensive superiority of her enlightenment as to the falseness of the world—*that* was the true object of life. As she walked, she thought she heard some one behind her. The fancied step made her heart beat a little quicker; but it was nothing, only a fancy: it stopped, and Evelyn did not look behind. Then, after a little interval, she heard it again: she turned round with a little anxiety, a little expectation, a little fear, thinking, perhaps, as she was near the door, she had better go home,—turned round suddenly, before the other person was aware of her intention; and—yes, it was he—there he stood before her, with the same look, the same attitude—Mr. Wentworth; not the hero, not the knight of romance, but the Mr. Wentworth who had been speaking in opposition to Sir Philip at Hustings, and who had started with horror at the sound of her name. She did not acknowledge his bow; she hurried to the door, trembling, afraid of herself, only anxious to get there for safety. He followed her so respectfully, that Evelyn trembled still more. Would she not speak to him? would she not hear him say one word—one word—before he left her for ever? "Oh! pray go away!" said Evelyn; "it was very wrong of me; I ought not to speak to any one whom mamma does not know. Oh! I beg your pardon; I do not mean to be rude; but pray, pray go away!"

"I shall immediately; I will go, never to cross your path or disturb you more," cried the hero in touching accents of despair; "I have tried to keep away because I had displeased you; but what can I do? Oh! Evelyn, I am here!" To this appeal Evelyn answered nothing: she had her hand upon the door, but she did not open it: she stood, not looking at him, but looking distressed, remorseful, guilty. What might he not do if she left him thus in despair?

"But it is for the last time; hear but one word, and I am gone," said Wentworth. "Ah! Evelyn, you know who I am: is it not so?"

"We know that you were at Hustings," said Evelyn, speaking almost under her breath; "but don't stay, please. Oh! I am very sorry you ever came here! I don't mean to be rude,—good-bye! I shall always wish you very well, if—if you will go away."

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"What an if!" cried the stranger; "but one word, Evelyn, one word! look at me."

Evelyn did not mean to do it; but she did it as she would have done anything she had been told to do; and the young man's face glowed and his eyes burned. She dropped her pensive head before his gaze, and listened like one fascinated: then it came forth in full tide,—a love tale, all the more ardent, all the more impetuous, perhaps all the more captivating to the terrified ears which listened, because it was in secret. Evelyn's tender heart was taken by storm; she could not say a word against this passionate fervour; she listened, drooping her delicate head; she put out her hand feebly to bid him stop; she entreated with faltering lips, "Oh! do not speak so; oh! please go away;" finally, the tears came sweeping out of her eyes in great heavy drops, falling warm upon the little gate: and then—and then, poor child! poor Evelyn!—then she found that she had betrayed herself, that her hand was in the hand, and her heart half promised and wholly given to the heart, of one who was a stranger, perhaps an enemy to all her race, and whose very name my lady did not know.

"But you will see mamma!" she exclaimed, her very lips growing white with sudden terror. "Mamma will forgive us, if you tell her: oh! I shall never dare to feel happy till you see mamma."

"But that is all," whispered the voice at her side; "if I did see mamma, you would be happy,—Evelyn, tell me?"

Poor Evelyn! she told him very plainly with her tearful eyes, though she did not speak a word; and he—he was very happy too for the moment, not uneasy to have led so young and gentle a creature out of the narrow, gentle pathway which was proper to her tender feet, the pathway all hedged and fortified with friends and guardians; but proud that for pure love of him, nothing else, she should have overstepped the bounds. He meant no harm; he did not even mean, when he came to seek her, to have said a word beyond the common courtesies of leave-taking. He knew there was a deadly obstacle between them, which nothing could ever lift away; he knew he could not go to ask her from her father or her mother; dared not whisper in the ears of his own family her hateful name: yet here he was, though he knew all this, thinking of nothing but his lover's triumph; while poor Evelyn, who was ignorant of any hinderance, felt as if there would not be another grief remaining in the world, if he did but tell mamma.

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"But, Evelyn, can you forbear with me a little longer?" said young Wentworth; "I dare not tell mamma—not now. Will you not keep our secret a little for my sake? Your mother is prejudiced against me: there is a feud between our families. Do not say anything yet till I am in a better position to speak to her: think what I should suffer, should she hear of our love abruptly, and forbid it. Ah! Evelyn, for my sake!"

"You do not know mamma; she would not be prejudiced against *you*. Oh! no," said Evelyn softly, turning her head away from him and feeling very faint; and then he persuaded her to confide in him, to tell him why she grew pale; and then he smiled to hear it was only because her mother was not to be told, and jested tenderly on her impatience, till Evelyn blushed at herself and smiled again. Only to wait a little while—surely she could do that: so long as he knew how *her* heart was, he cared for nothing else in the world.

And was this true? Evelyn believed it like a revelation from heaven: even his reasons for silence, if they did not convince her, quieted her mind, at least. One thing only shocked and terrified her afresh: he wanted to send her letters—her, Evelyn, my lady's daughter!—secretly, through her maid or some one in the house. He had almost lost all he had gained by that unwise proposal; but he withdrew it so quickly when he saw how distressed she was, and took such pains to reassure her, that Evelyn's confidence was restored at last; and then a sudden noise startled them, and a hurried parting ensued. They parted, Evelyn to hasten up the path, into the house, into her own room, to express her trembling joy and fright in a passion of bright tears,—tears which would have been all happiness, but for that haunting consciousness of a secret, that terrible drawback, that her own lips were sealed for his sake, and that he would not venture yet to tell mamma; while Wentworth went upon his way, elated, yet in trouble, seeing clearly all the impossibilities, cursing his own folly in returning here, calling himself a villain for deluding Evelyn, yet thinking of nothing so little as of giving up his pursuit of her. Had he but known who she was at first, before he suffered himself to stray so far! Evelyn! Evelyn! had she only been any Evelyn in the world but Evelyn Umphraville. He did not know what he intended; he meant no harm to her: in her rank, dishonourable purposes, had he been base enough for them, were folly to dream of; and he knew he never could

address my lady; never, without public shame and alienation from all his friends, could make Evelyn Umphraville his wife. What did he mean, then? He could not tell. In the meantime, he intended to please himself a little, and enjoy the presence and the speech, the stolen interviews, all the more delightful for their secresy, which were the food of that strange thing which he called his love. Poor Evelyn, once more! It was for this, a little pleasure to a young man, in the heyday of life, who had plenty of legitimate pleasures, had he chosen to take them, that she put this burden on her conscience,—that conscience which used to be so tender,—and gave, with a prodigal extravagance, her whole full heart. The poor child went about the house all day entranced in the beautiful dream, which only one jarring chord kept from Elysian harmony; began to put forth timid fancies into a new life, yet woke on the morrow with a start of guilt and tremor, to think of her mother's return, feeling, when my lady did not return, the joy of a culprit in a day's reprieve. And all this, her pleasure and her pain, were, for the sake of Herbert Wentworth, who went about trying to make rhymes for *her* sake, and fancying himself very much "in love;" while all the time he put away from him all real consideration for Evelyn, thinking nothing of her heart-break—thinking only of a little pleasure for to-day.

CHAPTER XLIV.

For a few days, therefore, Westwood contained a singular combination of jarring elements, enough to have kept a town—not to say a house—in hot water. Hugh, impatient, trying to endure a suspense, which was very hard upon him, uncertain of Susan, angry with himself, staying here against my lady's wish, though he knew it was wrong in every way—wrong for himself, and hazardous for her: Susan, still carrying the remembrance of those wounds which Miss Latimer's report of all the current gossip, and the letters of Miss Latimer's friends echoing the same, had made in her heart and in her pride, vexed to find herself here, mortified to perceive the seeming estrangement of Evelyn; feeling her breach with Hugh only superficially mended: Evelyn, finding a secret delight in her own dreams, which partly indemnified her for,

her sufferings otherwise, yet appearing to the household with a guilty cheek and a closed heart, terrified to be left in my lady's presence, afraid of Susan's familiar society, safe nowhere but alone: John Anthony, screwing up his courage for his mission to Sir Philip, yet making frightful faces at the thought of it: Miss Latimer, critical, and making observations on all. These made up a strange household; and when you fancy them all meeting at dinner, meeting at breakfast, exposed to each other's constant presence and scrutiny, it is not to be supposed that Westwood could be other than a disturbed and unharmonious house. This was further aggravated by the continued illness of Harry, who had fallen into a kind of low fever, which was likely to run a long course yet before he could be better, and whom, consequently, my lady could not send home. My lady was greatly disquieted by this thought. Sir Philip was at Heathcote for a day or two; already he must know that his eldest and youngest sons were with their mother. She had, indeed, written to the housekeeper immediately on Harry's appearance, to let them know he was here, and should return as soon as he was better: but Hugh's presence was a great aggravation, and it was impossible to say how Sir Philip might take it. My lady, too, was concerned and uneasy about Hugh himself and Susan, the two who were affianced, and yet not friends; and much troubled about Evelyn, vainly inquiring with herself what the girl could have to hide, or what could be the mysterious reason of her visible disquietude. My lady was deeply grieved and wounded, to see her child avoid her society, to perceive how entirely Evelyn's heart was closed to her: yet, in the midst of all these troubles, had to meditate and concert her plan for the due introduction of Susan to all the county people whom it was my lady's part to present her to, in her true character. And perhaps the best consolation my lady had among these abounding cares, were the letters of Rothes, from Rugby—Rothes, in whose good sense she could have so much confidence, and to whom she did not hesitate to confide, at least, a portion of her troubles,—and the invalid's room, where Harry did what he could to amuse himself, brightening always when his mother appeared. My lady's hands were full.

Out of the midst of all this subdued turmoil went John Anthony, stoutly trudging forth to Heathcote on his mission. When he got fairly upon the Downs, John Anthony stretched his long spare limbs, and drew a prodigious breath from his deep chest. He paused to look around him upon those southern

slopes, those chalky indentations in the soft hill sides, those homes of wealth, gleaming here and there amid their trees. That soft fertile populous country, those chalky cliffs and low hills, were not more unlike his rock-bound coast, his old peel-house at Redesdale, his landscape of moorland, bounded by the black line of the Cheviots, than was his present errand averse from the tenor of John Anthony's peaceable life. He paused, he drew in such a draught of breath as might have served a whole village, he shook himself, emitting a sound from his fine nostrils like the ha-ha of the charger, which scents the battle; and, having made all these preparations, the Northumbrian turned his face to the wind, and addressed himself to his mission, which, having undertaken, he had to do, disagreeable as it was. Sir Philip was at home—he was by himself in the library, in this desolate place, which seemed to his visitor to echo like a house deserted. It was sad to cross the hall, to traverse the long passage, without hearing a step or a sound, save his own foot and that of the servant who preceded him. John Anthony remembered last time, how some one was always opening a door, springing across a passage, seeking something in one room, or laying something aside in another. Now, there was no longer any one to move about the vacant house: some of the doors stood blankly open, showing the desolate good order of everything—some of them were shut, like doors of prisons—and the foot of the north-countryman woke quite a groan of emptiness in the forsaken hall. His heart softened unconsciously, and against his will. Though the law could only take money from him, and inflicted no other penalty, something which was not the law had punished the sinner. Sir Philip, by himself in Heathcote, was somewhat different from the triumphant Don Juan of the newspapers, or from the tyrant husband, who held inexhaustible powers over his wife. John Anthony went forward with quite a compunction—already he was sorry for the criminal.

Sir Philip sat by himself. writing his speech for the nomination-day. It was rather hard work, and his mind was not free to go on with it; on the contrary, he took long pauses between every half sentence, and fumed over the last domestic incident in his history, which had taken quite an exaggerated importance in his eyes. Every time his thoughts returned to it, he roused himself into blinder fury—he swore at the young villain vociferously and aloud; he vowed to have him home, ill or well, whatever might be the consequences; and at last, Sir

Philip began to collect his courage, and plan revenge against my lady, who had tried to render him contemptible in the eyes of the whole county, as he persuaded himself. He began to contemplate her blindly as his perpetual antagonist, as married people at war are apt to contemplate each other; he began to make out that she was at the bottom of all his mischances—that she had disgusted himself, and thrown him into vicious courses—that she had alienated the hearts of his children—that she had left him in ludicrous abandonment, a laughing-stock for everybody.

"By Jove! I'll not stand it any longer!" cried Sir Philip, to himself. "Hang it all, I am her husband! I've got the upper hand of her! She shall come home!" He had just relieved his feelings with this ebullition when John Anthony, who had gradually grown very sorry for him, on the way thither, was ushered into the library. Sir Philip started up with almost as much amazement as if my lady herself had entered. "Eh, eh, Foster!" he cried; "you here? Why, what on earth has brought you?"

"Shank's naggie, Sir Philip!" cried Foster, "and a small turn of business—little in my way if I had not been handy; but, I hope, pleasant enough to you."

"Shank's what?" cried the baronet. "Oh, ah! some of your Northumbrian jargon. But be quick with your business, for I'm in a hurry. Something from my lady, I suppose?"

"Not much of that," answered John Anthony: "it was rather a commission from Mr. Hugh."

"From Hugh!" cried Sir Philip, turning very red. "By Jove! if I stand this I'm a fool, and deserve to be laughed at! What's the confounded young villain lurking there for, eh? What does she mean by it? that's what I want to know. Am I such an idiot that she thinks she can go on with this, in spite of me, eh? D'ye think I'll stand it? If you do, you're all a pack of fools, and that's all I've got to say."

"Touching that subject, possibly," said John Anthony; "but I've no authority to meddle there. My errand is for Hugh; and, to tell the truth, he gave me to understand that he had done a good turn for you, and might expect as much back again; not that I approve of that, between father and son, in a general way. Never man liked errand worse than I do this. Hear me or not; I must clear my conscience: five minutes will do it all."

"Why can't the young ruffian come himself?" said his

father," sitting down, however, and moved by Hugh's preliminary communication to his envoy.

"He would have had my good leave," said Foster. "Here's the story: your son wishes you to understand, Sir Philip, that he is anxious to be married without delay: he wants your attention called to such needful things as settlements; he wants you to take counsel with the lawyers, and give your consent to his arrangements. I'm coming to the end of my tether: and he means, if you approve, that the wedding should be after he comes of age in May."

"The wedding, humph! and who's the bride, eh? Crazy Jane, that the Whigs make such a row about at Hustings?" said Sir Philip.

John Anthony grew very red; but he gulped down his wrath. "The young couple will want a house and establishment, especially as she's an heiress," said the ambassador, growing dignified; "that is another matter for your consideration, Sir Philip,"

"They shall come here," said the baronet, graciously. "I have no objections: a woman in a house is an advantage—that is to say, if she's not dangerous, and if she's presentable, eh, Foster? has lucid intervals?"

"Have a care," said John Anthony, grimly. "If she's not dangerous, I am, and such like as your son Hugh, and others I could mention: but, so far as I'm informed, the bridegroom has no thought of bringing his bride here."

"Oh! he told you so, did he?" cried Sir Philip. "Then, by Jove, if he doesn't bring her here, he shall take her nowhere. Some more of my lady's plans, eh? *I* know who's at the bottom of it all: teaches my children to conspire against me, does she? By Jove, she shall come home!"

"Is that the answer I'm to take to Hugh?" said John Anthony, rising from his chair, as his host had done. The Northumbrian was extremely anxious to get away; his own temper was no very sure ground in such circumstances as these.

"Harkye, you're my lady's agent," cried Sir Philip: "you can go and tell her I see through her devices. *I* know what a pretty plot she's laid to make a laughing-stock of me; but she shan't succeed, you can tell her. I'm as safe for Hustings as ever I was. I've got the law on my side. I have been a good-natured fool, and nothing better, to let her have her swing so long; but, by Jove, when she begins to entice my boys away with her confounded contrivances, and make conspiracies against

me, I'll stand it no longer. Tell my lady she shall hear from me; I'm not such a driveller as she supposes. That boy had better come home at once, unless he wants such a thrashing as he never got in his life; and as for my lady, she shall hear from me: I'll have her home, by Jove, if I bring her by force! This is a free country; hang it all! I'll let her know what a husband's rights are."

"Ay, Sir Philip, you're a lawmaker," cried John Anthony, with bitter irony. "Take care of the husband's rights, that's your plan. Send the poor women to destruction, trample them down into the mire, cast them out from human company, the poor, frail, sinful, polluted creatures! and stand up like a hero, and pay your damages and insult your wife! Ay, I see you; look as big as ever you can, you are less by a head than me. There's that other poor man could cast himself free of the woman you ruined; why can't my lady, the purest wife in England, cast off you and your dishonourable name, a viler sinner? Ay, ay, ay, you're a lawmaker, Sir Philip; stick to that, and take care of your husbands' rights, such lordly powers as they are: where could they be in better hands?"

"You—you—you villain!" stammered the enraged baronet with an oath; "do you dare to insult me?"

"Oh, ay! I dare a good deal, when I'm put to it," said John Anthony, "and I'll not say but I could swear myself, on occasion; however, that's neither here nor there. You'll take notice that I came to you, not on my lady's behalf, but with an errand from your son, Hugh Umphraville; and I'm to take back to him your answer, that unless he brings his wife here, you refuse your consent to his marriage, not to say sundry pleasant words about herself, which you would, maybe, like me to take a note of for that young man's benefit: and that's all, Sir Philip? if it is, I'll say good-day."

But Sir Philip paused irresolute. Brakehurst Farm was not yet sold, nor its entail broken: this was a different matter, according to the baronet's high-minded style of reasoning: Hugh had it abundantly in his power to thwart him, did he thwart Hugh. He hesitated to confirm John Anthony's account of the answer he had given: it did not seem a very likely one to satisfy his high-spirited and quick-tempered heir. "I tell you what, Foster; don't aggravate me," he said at last; "I've enough of that. Tell Hugh he can see my solicitor, and I'll see *him;* but mind, that makes no difference with my lady: tell her exactly what I told you. I know what my rights are,

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and, by Jove, I mean to uphold them. Do you think it matters to me what a set of people say? Tell her she shall hear from me." Sir Philip pronounced the last words with an air of dignity, and turned away; whereupon, John Anthony, only too glad to make his escape before his indignation exploded further, strode off without a word, let himself out, and made his way over the Downs at an astounding pace, to the terror and amazement of every Sussex peasant he met on his way. The blood boiled in John Anthony's honest veins: he went twice the distance between Heathcote and Westwood before he felt himself sufficiently cooled down to return.

CHAPTER XLV.

"THAT is just the simple upshot, neither more nor less," said John Anthony: "I have told my lady." Hugh grew red, and he grew pale; the veins rose on his forehead; he looked blankly at his emissary, like a man who would fain run his head against something,—the first wall of impossibility before him.

"What can he do? how can he annoy my mother?" he asked with a hoarseness in his voice.

It was very much Hugh's fault; yet Hugh chafed indignantly at the thought that he could not visit his mother, without setting loose an array of legal pains and penalties upon her. "Do?" cried John Anthony, exploding after his long self-control; "whatever he likes, my boy. He's her husband. What *he* has done, only disgraces, only destroys, only makes an end of a woman. It's fine sport for *us*, Hugh Umphraville. What, lad, don't you see your own privileges? you'll marry presently, then you can do what such a man as I have no chance for: you may forsake your wife; you may go (if you can) and make some other man's wife a pest and nuisance, too vile for honest folk to look upon; you may make your sport of him, if he doesn't shoot you between hands; and then you can come home, my lord, and take possession of your own property, your goods and chattels, maybe a woman worth a hundred such as you, and keep her bound to your pleasure. If she flies from you, you can drag her back again; you can spend her money; you can take away her children; you can shut her up from every comfort under heaven. Aha! Hugh, let your father teach you to appreciate your rights, my boy.

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That's what a man can do, mark you, Hugh Umphraville, if he's a villain."

"Foster, silence!" cried Hugh; "my father is not a villain!"

John Anthony turned on his heel with a long whistle of disdain. "So my lady said, when she trusted him," said the north-countryman. "We'll see,—sin's fruitful: I never knew an evil spirit yet that abode alone." And Foster once more sallied forth to calm himself down with a long walk over the Downs, leaving Hugh alone to think over a hundred plans of defence for his mother. The young man's first resolution was absolute, to hasten to Heathcote, to warn Sir Philip that a single step against my lady would put an immediate end to all friendship between himself and his heir, and, by consequence, to all the assistance in his own affairs which he had asked Hugh to render him. However, Hugh could not keep himself to this first angry intention: he could not threaten his father; he could not even believe that what he had said was anything but a mere outbreak of impatience,—words and nothing more. What then was he to do? he was injuring my lady's cause, and he was not advancing his own; though Susan was here, no one was happy. He made up his mind with a gulp of indignation and of wounded feeling: since his presence was no pleasure, no benefit to any one, he would return to his college—he would go away. John Anthony was fated that day to penetrate still further into the secrets of this family: he saw by chance Evelyn's meeting with her lover; he saw, though he was a good way off, the agitation, the tremor, the careful looks behind and around, to make sure that no one from Westwood saw them,—all the tokens of a secret meeting. Foster was struck with amazement and dismay. He was fond of Evelyn, as most people were, and though he did not interrupt this troubled interview, he waited for her, marching up and down just out of sight of the house till she returned. Then John Anthony appealed to his "ladybird:" would she grieve my lady, who possibly might have a great many trials yet before her? But, alas! Evelyn was selfish in her own pre-occupation: she had no apprehension of any trials which could come upon her mother. She entreated and implored him not to say anything; it was only for a very, very little time: she never would meet *him* again till my lady knew, and *he* was to tell my lady soon, if John Anthony would but be silent. The compassionate friend of the family consented at last, overpowered by her petitions.

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"Take heed, ladybird—take heed to your steps!" cried John Anthony; and she raised her hand with such an eager, intense, terrified anxiety, lest some one should hear him, that the heart of the Northumbrian was sore within him. He was glad to go away to his own lonely house, out of the troubles of this life, glad to hide his indignation, his fears, and his pity, in those undisturbed solitary days which waited for him among the moors of Redesdale: it was safer for him there than here. And Hugh went away, no one endeavouring to detain him; and, in the midst of all her troubles, my lady sent out her invitations for a great dinner party, such a one as she might have given to celebrate Sir Philip's success at Hustings, had she still been at Heathcote; a party which included all the great people of the county, and even included old Lady Curtis and her gouty old husband, a patriarchal Sir John, who would not object to take the foot of my lady's table and the charge of her guests. Life is a strange medley: my lady's heart was racked with anxiety, every morning renewing her dread of some fulfilment of Sir Philip's threat, while at the same moment her house began to be stirred with the preparations of this unusual entertainment, which made more disturbance in the limited rooms of Westwood than it could have done at Heathcote. The bustle, however, was one which nobody enjoyed, save Edie, to whom everything new was a windfall. Evelyn shrank from it with terror, fearing—she knew not why—to see a crowd of faces, fearing to meet in her mother's house the Mrs. Hastings, *his* friend, who was to have introduced him to my lady; while Susan, jealous of the real purpose of the assembly, and guessing that it was convened on her own account, was by no means satisfied to submit herself to the inspection of the county, and recollected once more with burning cheeks what the county had said, and had heard said of her. Altogether, it was not much of a festival to any of them; still it had been planned and resolved upon, and was to be. And after the interval of a fortnight, Westwood blazed with light, and was crowded with guests; everybody was there, from my Lord Bognor and his unmarried son and daughter down to Miss Hardwick and Miss Clarissa from Broadmead Rectory. Everybody came who was asked, partly from good feeling, partly from curiosity; and everybody chose to appear in their best style, and do my lady honour. My lady, in her favourite velvet gown, her rich lace cap with its pink and white roses, her soft, snowy, delicate abundance of lace and cambric,

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had never looked better in her life, her guests thought; though those who knew her best, knew that one longitudinal wrinkle between her eyes to be deeper and more strongly marked than it had ever been before, and detected the fluctuation of anxiety in the pure colour of her cheek. And nobody wondered at the timid uncertain air of Evelyn: she was a secondary person; she was not the heroine of the night. Susan, who had this part to play, had at last become reconciled to my lady's great effort on her behalf: Susan was sufficiently mollified to dress her best and look her best, out of consideration for my lady. As she was presented to one after another of the ladies present, a little rustle of curiosity moved them: they looked at each other with compunction and penitence; they wondered indignantly, in whispers, who could have originated so absurd a story—for Susan's fair, calm, Saxon good-sense carried immediate conviction with it. She was not a high-souled enthusiastic beauty; she was not even dreamy and pensive, like poor pretty Evelyn; her candid face, her open eyes, her frank, sensible, genuine simplicity, which went straight to the point, carried everything before them. Old Lady Curtis quite took her up, and made a pet of her. "I am surprised at Hugh, my lady," said Hugh's lively ancestress; "I never thought the boy had so much judgment, such admirable taste. My dear, I shall be your grandmother presently; call me so: I like you extremely. We shall be the best friends in the world when you come to Heathcote; and I shall certainly write and tell Hugh that I think him a most fortunate man."

"I shouldn't wonder if she did a great deal of good in the family; she looks so sensible," whispered another old lady to Lady Curtis.

"Ah! my dear, my lady's sensible," cried grandmamma, tapping her friend with her fan: "people of sense have their own ideas most frequently; they are sometimes a deal harder to manage than fools."

Wherefore Lady Curtis did not augur astonishing results in the way of peacemaking from Susan. Susan had her own opinions, doubtless, on the vexed question of the family, and would show them sooner or later; but Susan had made a decided success on her first introduction to society in the county, which was quite reason enough to place her very high in the good graces of grandmamma. Meanwhile, Miss Latimer sat looking on with a lofty and magnanimous disapproval, edifying to see, patronising the Misses Hardwick, and sending her love

to their poor dear niece. Poor dear! the ladies from the rectory could not make out how Minnie deserved that title; but with true benevolence, they treasured up all the applause of Susan which surrounded them, to refresh the young lady at home withal.

"Though what she has to do with Miss Mitford, or how she should care, with such prospects of her own, I cannot conceive," cried Miss Clarissa.

If these innocent people could but have known how much Minnie cared once, how very, very little she cared now!

CHAPTER XLVI.

"Why do you wish to tell my lady? I am sure my lady cannot care: *we* shall tell her the next time we see her," said Miss Clarissa; "but I fear, Minnie, my poor child, that your new prospects have turned your head a little. Lady Umphraville, of course, was very kind and took a great deal of notice of you before she left Heathcote; but that was *entirely* on our account: you need not distress yourself about looking ungrateful; I shall take care to explain all that."

"Thank you, Aunt Clarissa! if you think so, of course it is perfectly right; but my lady might blame *you*, which was all my anxiety," said Minnie.

The conclusion of this argument was, that Minnie's regard for her aunts, lest my lady should blame them, prevailed; that they all got into the queer old vehicle, which was called the phaeton at the Rectory, and drove off to Westwood a few mornings after the party, with the intention of intimating to the family there "the prospects" of Minnie, to wit, her engagement with Mr. Manifold. Minnie had several reasons for this step; in the first place, because my lady's dinner party proved her anxiety to set Susan right in the eyes of the little world around them; in the second place, because Minnie herself had been pointedly excluded from it; and lastly and principally, because, being guilty, she was full of fears; and could not believe in my lady's willingness to let her off entirely unpunished. "I should tell him all about it, if it was me," acknowledged Minnie to herself; and if my lady did so, what ruin and disorder might come to all her hopes. Accordingly, while her aunts amused themselves after their own fashion,—Miss Clarissa, improving the time with a book, yet with her

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attention sufficiently disengaged to look up sharply when they passed a cottage door where the mistress came forth to curtsey, or startled a little band of children into bobs and bows; and Miss Hardwick, throwing out bits of biscuit to encourage the panting progress of her dog, which accompanied the phaeton on foot, though not accustomed to such violent exercise,—Minnie, leaning back in her corner, meditated over and over again what she should do, whether put a good face upon the whole matter, as if nothing had happened, or throw herself upon my lady's mercy. It was rather difficult to decide; so she waited like a wise woman for the guidance of circumstances, feeling quite convinced of her own steadiness and readiness as soon as she really saw which was best. The visitors were received rather solemnly at Westwood—by the whole assembled family, as it happened, no one of whom showed much cordiality to Minnie, except Miss Latimer; and even Aunt Margaret's sympathy was changed into disgust and disappointment, awful to behold! when she ascertained the fact which they had come to tell. "What! engaged! already? My poor child, beware! you are sacrificing your happiness to your pride," cried Miss Latimer, significantly; "if you have done this out of a momentary pique, you will repent it all your life."

"Indeed you are quite mistaken, I assure you," said Minnie. But this conversation, in spite of all that Minnie could do to prevent it, became audible to everybody at this point; everybody became quite silent and listened. Susan looked up with a lively appreciation of the whole; my lady turned her eyes in the same direction, having a tolerably good guess at the truth; while Minnie's aunts listened in consternation, not knowing what to make of it.

"I repeat," said Miss Latimer, "that if you have done this in a fit of pique, you will repent it all your life: I am sorry for you. I don't wonder that a young woman should almost feel herself entitled to revenge, upon another of his sex, the heartlessness of the man who has trifled with her own affections: still, I warn you, it is misery."

"What is all this about?" cried Miss Clarissa. "Minnie, Miss Latimer seems to know a great deal more about you than we do: what does it mean?"

"Oh! nothing, aunt, nothing!" cried Minnie.

Minnie's face was covered with a violent blush; she dared not look around; she dared not meet any eye in the room: her heart fainted with fear. Minnie, who was so bold, so full

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of resources, when she was poor and had nothing much to hope for, was paralysed now with the thought of her prospects and of all she might lose, and trembled before Miss Latimer, whom she would have despised a little while ago. "Nothing," added Minnie, faintly; "only I suppose, Aunt Clarissa, Miss Latimer thinks I have changed my mind."

"I think what is a great deal worse," said Miss Latimer, solemnly; "I think that, without changing her mind—at least, without changing her heart, which is given to another—she is about to marry in pique or for an establishment. Oh, women! what is the use of labouring, of persuading, of making one's self all things to all sorts of people, when this is the invariable issue? What is it, I ask, that makes wretched marriages? It is when there is no love, or when all the love is on one side; or it is when a headlong passion leaps the boundaries of nature. What happiness, I ask, is to be looked for from men who trifle with the hearts of women, and drive them into fatal steps like this: or from women who consent to marry for secondary inducements? Eleanor, these young people ought to hear me! all of them; even Edie! Why should they not hear the proper principles of marriage? Only last night I heard some one speak of a cousin of Evelyn's, whom there had been a sort of understood engagement with from childhood: a cousin, a first-cousin!—and this! and this!" added Aunt Margaret, pointing first to Susan and then to Minnie. "It is enough to make any one of proper feelings renounce the world."

"Dear! what is wrong about a first-cousin?" asked Miss Clarissa in alarm. "My sister made such a marriage: I never knew any ill of it. What is wrong?"

"Has she any children? are there no idiots among them?" asked Miss Latimer, with mild compassion; when there suddenly uprose such a burst of hysterical laughter from Minnie, that everybody was alarmed, and the rising indignation took a different channel.

"There are ten of us," cried Minnie, with tears of mirth and triumph in her eyes, "and the baby; we've all had measles and hooping-cough and scarlet-fever and everything, and mamma never had a dull child that ever I heard of, unless it was me!" and Minnie looked round with a face sparkling with fun and mischief, her eyes bright, her handsome little head erect, her courage restored: that last touch had delivered her from her adversary.

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While Evelyn sat opposite, her work fallen into her lap, her eyes fixed upon her mother's face, her own cheeks pale as marble. A cousin—an engagement! what was this? In a moment, her imagination conjured up a succession of terrors: another lover coming openly, with my lady's sanction; my lady's commands, perhaps, laid upon herself, and Wentworth unknown, Wentworth gone away. It saved Minnie, but it was like a sudden poisoned arrow to Evelyn. After this, the visit reached its conclusion without any further harm. Minnie had made up her mind. When they were leaving, she appealed with a humble face to my lady: she asked for a moment's conversation; she got herself invited into the morning parlour.

"My lady," cried Minnie, with a voice full of penitence, "I have been very, very wrong! oh, will you forgive me? I see all my error now."

My lady looked at the young intriguer rather severely: "I am obliged to believe it was you who did it all: what possible motive could you have?" said Lady Umphraville; "it is a mystery to me."

"I have no motive now," said Minnie; "I was very wrong; will you forgive me? My lady, some people do better when they are prosperous than when they are poor. I have a great many little brothers and sisters: I shall be a good wife: will you forget what a wicked girl I was, and forgive me? for you could make me as poor and as wicked as ever, if you pleased."

"*I* could make you?" cried my lady, amazed by this sudden candour. "You may be quite sure I shall not interfere with your prospects, Minnie. I don't approve of you, you know; indeed you have done what you could to injure us all; but perhaps it is true what you say,—be prosperous and be good, and I shall be glad to hear of it. After all, you have done no real harm; you only meant it; and I hope you will take a lesson, and never do so again." So saying, my lady turned away with some loftiness, ignorant of the fact that this wicked little girl's heart was quite ready to melt, and that a touch of kind forgiveness might have done Minnie a world of good just at that moment. But the best people in the world are human, and lack the gift of seeing into hearts. My lady went out with a stately air to say good-bye to her elder visitors, and Minnie wiped the incipient tear out of the corner of her eye, smiled at herself, and was done with fears and penitence. Done with scheming, too, as she mentally resolved; but only because she was quite unlikely to have any farther use for it.

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My lady had blighted the tender bud of Minnie's repentance like a November frost, yet was as little aware of it as were Miss Hardwick and Miss Clarissa, quietly driving home in the ancient phaeton, the one with her book and the other with her dog.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Another month passed quietly and without event, except that Harry got better, was sent to Heathcote, and there had a stormy reception from his father, which the boy resented with the utmost pride and violence. Sir Philip struck him, though without meaning it, a blow which knocked him down. Harry told no one, but brooded over this with a sullen defiance, which made him a very uncomfortable companion in the solitary rooms of Heathcote. He did not complain; he did not say a word to my lady; but he came to Westwood almost every day, stayed almost all day long, persisted in this almost in direct disobedience to his mother's commands, and began to grow a tall, spare savage, like John Anthony, with immense developments of bone and muscle, and a frame insensible to fatigue. Twelve miles a day across the Downs, uncertain meals, and the fire of discontent within him, did not stop his growth certainly, but thrust it all into one direction; he grew nearly as tall as Hugh before he was fourteen, and became daily more ungovernable, daily less obedient even to his mother. Sir Philip took no trouble with him, save to insist upon his presence and to aggravate the lad's temper with exactions: Sir Philip seemed even to entertain some idea that, by suffering the boy to grow up wild, untaught, and uncared for, he was revenging himself upon my lady, which indeed was the case to a great extent; for my lady could not help saying to herself sometimes, that it might be her fault if the promise of her son's childhood was lost in an unruly youth; that perhaps she ought to have endured all things, even a life which was a perpetual torture, for the sake of her children. These were matters altogether out of the law, which legal intervention could do nothing for; but they were not less hard to bear because they were natural evils springing, by inevitable sequence, from circumstances made unnatural by sin. But still Sir Philip had not fulfilled his threat; he had repeated it to Harry, though my lady did not know; but she had not heard from himself, as he said she should, and her mind was relieved on this point, much and

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sorely though it was troubled about her boy. It was now March, almost April,—spring; and Miss Latimer was on the eve of leaving Westwood with Evelyn and Susan. These two young ladies had not changed much during the interval. Evelyn had kept her word to John Anthony, not because it was her word to him, but because Wentworth had gone away. She had not seen him now for nearly six weeks, and during all that time she had not heard from him, because she would not consent to receive clandestine letters. This self-denial cost Evelyn a great deal; but she held to it almost obstinately. Perhaps he might write when she was in London at Miss Latimer's; that was a hope which sustained her: and the poor child kept looking forward, day by day, to that other hour of trembling triumph when he should come to my lady's feet, and tell the whole tale and beg her forgiveness. That day! if it were only come, Evelyn thought, she could bear anything after it, even separation, for then at least she could die contented without this guilt upon her conscience. So thought the poor tender heart which had already suffered a lifetime of pain, in exchange for the momentary delight of her dreams. And now she was going to London, away from her mother, whose daily tenderness and anxiety were a daily reproach to her, to where she might hear from him, might see him,—an unnatural satisfaction, which she was ashamed of, possessed Evelyn: it was not a young girl's pleasant thought of the unknown world; it was the longing of a deceiver to escape from observation, to breathe freely for one poor moment, out of the scrutiny of those who loved her best.

"Evelyn, my dear child, you are going away; I think you never were away from me by yourself before," said my lady on the morning of the day they were to part. My lady never addressed her without bringing a blush to Evelyn's face.

"I have been at grandmamma's," she said in a faltering voice.

"Yes; but everything was very different then," said my lady; "I do not know what would become of you and Edie, if anything happened to me."

"Mamma!" cried Evelyn, gazing at her in blank dismay and terror; "you are not ill?"

"I am not ill; but I fancy, somehow——never mind, it is nothing, the merest folly in the world; and you know I am not fanciful," said my lady, smiling; "but I shall be very glad when Hugh is married—then your brother's house will be your

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natural shelter: remember, I should like you to go there, Evie. Don't be alarmed, my love; I am quite well; but one never knows."

"Oh, mamma! you do know something, or you never would talk so," cried Evelyn, throwing herself on her knees before her mother in an agony of terror.

"Nothing at all, my dear," said my lady, promptly; "but, Evie, do you know that, all this winter, I have been unhappy about you?" Evelyn made no answer; every tint of colour faded from her face as she looked up to my lady; but she did not say a word. "If it had been possible that my child could have anything to conceal from me," said my lady, pointedly, "I should have been forced to suppose *that*, Evelyn; but now I can only think that your feelings are too tender, too sensitive, that all this trouble has moved you beyond your strength. Now, Evie, you are going away, and I mean you to come home grown and strengthened; do you understand what I say?"

"Yes, mamma," said the unfortunate child, with her secret at her heart. She had hid her face in her mother's dress; it was very well for her, for the look of it was like despair; it seemed to Evelyn that her very silence was a lie. "Then, Evie," said my lady, sighing heavily, "that is all I have to say to you, my dear child. I want you to enjoy yourself while you are away, and I want you to come home a woman to support your mother. Sometimes I think my mind grows weak under all these troubles," said my lady, surprised into tears, and putting up her hand with a kind of painful astonishment to find them: "If Hugh were only married, I should be a great deal happier, or—I have been slow to speak to you on such a subject—if my poor Evie were but safe in a home of her own." The words fell into the depths of Evelyn's heart like a stone. Her low cry, "Oh, mamma!" was more like the stifled outcry of extreme pain than a girl's abashed remonstrance at the entrance of such a subject. My lady went on without noticing what Evelyn said.

"Yes, my love—you will see the Eldons in town. I won't tell you what I have heard of Charlie, Evelyn; but you used to be great friends when you were children. There! that will do; I don't mean to say any more now, my dear child: rise and kiss me, and don't think too much upon anything. God will take care of us all, Evie; I am not afraid."

Touched with a vague and undefined fear at the unusual

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seriousness of her mother's tone, feeling herself too guilty to receive that kiss which trembled on her cheek, Evelyn stole away like a ghost to her own room. Her own room, where so many innocent fancies had once had place, which she had been so pleased to embellish and adorn, which she was now so glad to escape from. The honeysuckle leaves were bursting like young birds from the husky brown nest which still detained them; the window was full of primroses which Harry and Edie had gathered; the spring sun came in over them with a smile of youth which it made one's heart beat to see. Everything in the common air was filled with renewed life and exhilaration; but Evelyn gathered up the last little trifles left on her table with nervous fingers, afraid even of her maid, who was in the room completing her packing. What could my lady mean? could she be ill, and no one know? and how—oh! how—could she ever forgive the unhappy girl who, even after what she had said, went on deceiving her? Evelyn looked ghastly when she came down-stairs with her bonnet on, ready to go away. She went to her mother, and entreated that she might stay at home. "Oh! mamma, I think you are ill?" cried Evelyn. But my lady was not ill; she stood at the door in the sunshine, in her soft satin gown, smiling and waving her hand to them.

"Be very happy, Evie, and don't be at all afraid for me," said my lady. So they drove away upon that last look of home, which looked so like happiness. Edie, by my lady's side, calling out messages as long as they could hear; Harry, at her other hand, looking as if he supported his mother, and proud of his office: the flower borders shining with primroses, and one golden blossom bursting on the sullen furze; and, beyond all, the sea, gladdening the horizon with the great peaceful smile which that deceiver wears when it is at rest. Who could think of any evil in store, any danger rising over that house of Westwood? Yet, with a thrill at her heart, and a pang of anxiety, Evelyn thought as of a new unknown existence, of the time of her return,—what might happen before then? Poor child! she only asked whether it might happen that her love-tale should be revealed to my lady, and her secret forgiven; she was not even afraid of Charlie Eldon, rosy-cheeked Charlie, her old playmate, who could not stand a moment's chance before Herbert Wentworth; and not the faintest presentiment crossed Evelyn of all that would indeed and truly happen before she returned home.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

Miss Latimer's house was in Belgravia, in Eccleston Square, rather a large house for an unmarried lady; but Miss Latimer did not by any means spend *every* season in London, or keep her establishment there for her own benefit solely: she let it very frequently to people richer than herself, while she was abroad or circulating among her friends in the country; so that it was by no means a permanent burden upon her income, but rather the contrary. It looked very cheerful to Susan and Evelyn, country-bred as they were, to be able still to look down from their windows, even amid the exhilarating bustle of London life at that time of the year, upon the tender brown leaves of the lilac bushes, half unfolded, and on the early almond blossoms, which made a flush of promise and sweetness, even within the iron railings of the square. Miss Latimer's friends began to gather about them almost as soon as they arrived in London: there were a number of people who believed in Miss Latimer,—simple-minded mothers of families, who had known her when she was a girl, and somehow had been trained to look up to her, and supposed she had been able to give a great deal more attention to serious matters of thought than they could do in their practical life; people of high refinement afflicted with delicate health, and a general responsibility and supervision of the world which led them into very delicate discussions and kept them in occupation: not to speak of young people of superior tastes, who were very well up in all the current philosophies, and knew all the gossip about all the philosophers of a certain degree of fashion and eminence, who made translations from the German, and published little volumes of a philanthropical, sanatorial, self-sacrificial morality. Let nobody suppose, however, that this "circle" was a district-visiting, charity-giving, religious circle; quite the contrary. Miss Latimer's friends exercised a flattering patronage towards the Church as a well-meaning institution, rather behind the times: many of them, herself among the number, attended its services as a matter of civility. What they believed was rather a doubtful matter for an inquirer—they did not know themselves, unfortunately; but they were highly intellectual, well-educated, agreeable people, in spite of that small drawback, with no end of talk and stores of information. Susan and Evelyn thought them all exceedingly clever for the first three weeks; and marvelled much, in

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their unsophisticated minds, why people so full of genius were not publicly distinguished; but, by the end of the three weeks, Susan began to have a little insight into the matter, though the innocent Evelyn might have gone on believing and admiring to the end of time. Besides this society, Miss Latimer had access to higher circles, whither, by way of doing her duty to them, she carried her young friends. Gradually they became very much occupied, very much sought after. Everybody found an attraction in Susan's fresh, simple intelligence, her Saxon self-command and good sense, her distinct straightforwardness, which went through the maze of polite pretences like a sunbeam. She was pretty enough, gentle enough, and young enough to be forgiven for her strange and piquant sincerity. Several of her new companions fell violently in love with her,—her *female* companions be it premised,—escaping with almost vociferous gladness out of the web of polite seeming, which gradually involves even the youngest and freshest, into the society of the country girl who knew nothing of it.

"It's like going to the country, coming to you," cried one young lady, who always kissed Susan fervently as a climax of her approval; and Susan submitted to the kisses, and did not have her head turned by the applause.

While, as for Evelyn, she grew so pretty in her tender romance and foolishness, and wore her heart—with all its timid griefs and fears and fancies, and all the hopes that brightened it—so fully in her eyes, that other eyes followed her with a kind of enchantment. Everybody wondered why that sweet pensive girl looked so sad; everybody delighted to see the colour rise in her cheek, and her blue eyes brighten; so that the man or woman who procured this result, quite felt that he or she had done a good action, and liked the young dreamer ever after in consequence. Then the two made such a contrast to each other: Susan so helpful and self-controlled; Evelyn so dependent, so tender, so wistful to find her own ill or well in the looks of others. Miss Latimer became very popular among all her acquaintances. She was so perfectly proper, lady-like, and dignified; she was quite an acquisition with her two pretty *protégées*. So they had full enjoyment of all the advantages of the season at that early period of its course, and spent all those soft April nights in crowded rooms and fashionable society. Susan was not at all above this unusual gaiety; she enjoyed it with all her heart, naturally, and with a genuine pleasure; but Susan's agreeable expectation of where

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they were going to-night and to-morrow night and the night after, was nothing to the eagerness of Evelyn. She made her toilette, every evening, with a beating heart; every day when they drove out, the colour went and came upon her cheek with a feverish fluctuation, which made her beautiful to look at, but betrayed a mind sadly disturbed and unsteady. And once Susan, watchful over her future sister, saw the blood flush violently over Evelyn's face, only to be succeeded by an entire and deadly paleness. What was the cause? They were passing a group of young men on horseback, none of whom Susan had ever seen before: she could not suppose that Evelyn's agitation originated there. But Evelyn, in that indifferent group had seen *him*, had seen him among others like himself, laughing and looking happy; and he had seen her! It was the first time they had met in the presence of others, and it struck to Evelyn's heart to find that, though he started, he made no movement of recognition. Yes, it was quite right, quite necessary; how should he venture to seem to know her while she was with friends of whom he knew nothing? Was it not to be desired that he should take no notice, until he could do so legitimately? But Evelyn's heart was unreasonable: she was nearly fainting when they reached home: she thought he might have contrived somehow to show that he knew her, and was glad. All her feverish consciousness of guilt and secrecy, which had been kept in abeyance a little, returned in double flood: she was ashamed to find herself in such strange distressing circumstances, affianced, pledged—heart and faith—to a man whom she passed by in the public ways without a word of recognition;—to pass by him, and pretend not to know him,—to see him pass by her calmly like a stranger. Alas! what had Evelyn done to involve herself in this long-continued sickening lie? She thought she would stay at home that night, with a despairing terror lest she should see him at every new step she made, mixed and aggravated by a very different feeling; but they persuaded her otherwise. She was dressed more richly than usual, with especial care and pains, though she took no interest in it. The heat of anxiety which had returned to her cheeks was so far subdued by this time, that it only made her look blooming, dazzling in the sweet purity of her complexion; she had white flowers in her hair, and a dress of white silk and lace,—lace which fell softly round her, somehow persuaded out of its voluminous fashion by her yielding slender figure and drooping

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head. Miss Latimer and Susan paused in astonishment to look at her when she appeared; even Aunt Margaret felt a momentary touch of pride in her beautiful charge.

"I don't know what is going to happen, Evelyn," said Susan, helping to wrap her cloak round her, and feeling, as she did so, the beating of Evelyn's heart against her arm; but you never looked so well as you do to-night; and here is a bouquet for you like mine: look, Evelyn,—lilies of the valley. Some one sent them half an hour ago."

Some one! the word made Evelyn's heart leap; could it be *him?*

"My dear, they came from Mrs. Eldon; do not give yourself the trouble of guessing," said Aunt Margaret; "but pray come down, young ladies; we shall be late." So they went down with their lilies of the valley, which were entirely disenchanted by this time, Susan keeping Evelyn's arm in her own, to steady her friend with her cool touch, and wondering painfully, in her own mind, what could be the cause of all this agitation. Perhaps many another besides Evelyn was glad of the dark drive that night through the quiet streets, the cool air and silence of those few intermediary minutes between their own house and the brilliant crowd of this great assembly. She, poor child! shed a few tears over her lilies, and remembered the faint sweet perfume of them, and how the delicate bells lay on the smooth leaves for many a long day after; but Charlie Eldon would not have come so joyously to meet them, when he found them out in the thronged rooms of the great lady's reception, had he known how his first timid love-token had been received by Evelyn, and how her heart sank to hear it was his. But the time was passing over in quite an ordinary way, as evenings do generally pass in society, when Evelyn was suddenly roused to observe some one, who came to be presented to Miss Latimer. Her bouquet fell out of her hand upon the floor, and she was glad that no one saw it, but that she could stoop down to pick it up herself, and for the moment conceal her face. Yes, it was *him*—him whom she called Herbert in her heart and secret; but whom, in the sight of other people, she dared not appear to know, even as one stranger knows another. When she raised her head the lights seemed swimming in her eyes; the whole room was a maze of indistinct brightness: she did not hear the words which some one was addressing to herself, but only the half heard words which *he* was addressing to Aunt Margaret. Every sight and

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sound in the world was lost to Evelyn, save a dark tall figure at one side, which she could not venture to look at, and a murmur of words, not spoken to herself, which she could not hear. The colour fled from her cheek, and then returned to it in renewed brilliancy: she kept her seat, and almost her consciousness, by the greatest effort; while Susan, perceiving Evelyn's agitation, fixed her eyes steadily on the new-comer, with an observation which he did not fail to notice. And *he* stood there, talking to Miss Latimer, almost within reach of Evelyn, seeing her and every movement she made—stood long, watching how Charlie Eldon came and went, and moved to a contemptuous jealousy. At last, when Evelyn thought it was not possible to endure it any longer, he was presented carelessly by Miss Latimer to Susan and herself. The poor girl's heart beat high as she lifted her beautiful wet eyes to his face for a moment, and bent her head in answer to his bow. At last, at last, she might venture to say she knew him; at last she could look at him without shame! She did not say a word; she did not look up after that first glance; but an ease, unknown to her for a long time, stole over Evelyn's heart. He kept near them, talking to Susan; and, though Evelyn could scarcely tell what he said, the sound of his voice soothed her. The poor child grew happy as she sat by, hearing nothing but that sound; and, growing happy, dazzled the eyes of Charlie Eldon, and flattered with her new developed beauty the vanity of the stranger by her side, whom she called Herbert in her heart, and her betrothed. Mr. Wentworth felt that his taste did him credit, that the pretty pensive country girl was growing beautiful—and thought, with really a pang, that though he had managed for this once to give her the pleasure of beholding him, no one must ever say that he was a lover of Evelyn Umphraville; so he talked to Susan Mitford instead, and did not say a word to Evelyn; and Evelyn was content—Evelyn was happy—and went home again, nestling in her corner of the carriage, hiding her tears of joy with poor Charlie's lilies of the valley, and already seeing in imagination that scene which she had begun to think would never, never come to reality, that confession and explanation and disclosure of everything, which could only be made when Herbert Wentworth was at my lady's feet.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

After this, for some days, Evelyn's life passed in a dream: she went out and came in, in the one sole hope of seeing or hearing from Herbert. The secrecy of their unfortunate wooing gave him such a command over her, as not one lover in a thousand attains to. She could think of nothing else, hope for nothing else; her very prayers turned into a perpetual repetition of one entreaty,—he had taken the first step towards the fulfilment of her hopes, he had seen Miss Latimer, Oh! if he would but see my lady! Evelyn's earnest desire and longing turned to an agony: once more she lived in feverish abstraction from the common life around her; once more began to start and tremble when any one came to the door, and grew pale as death when she received letters; but it was all in vain. For so long a time that their slight and casual acquaintanceship seemed quite unable to survive it, they did not even meet Mr. Wentworth: he never wrote, he never came. Poor Evelyn could not tell what to think, or what to fear. Did he feel it so impossible to tell my lady, that he refrained in honour from seeing *her?* or was it possible that here, where so many people were superior to her, Herbert had forgotten Evelyn? Her cheek blanched, her heart fluttered in her throat; she grew sick with all these uncertainties; for which it was, or whether it was any of these causes, poor Evelyn had no means to tell. At length, after this terrible interval, they began to meet him again—to meet him "in society," in the dreadful brilliancy of those assemblies where, if there might be opportunities of a word apart, Wentworth never attempted to avail himself of them. Sometimes Evelyn's wistful eyes met his, and drooped under the old look of tenderness; but, though he joined their little party when he could, he scarcely ever addressed "Miss Umphraville." She thought this was kind at first; for how could she talk to him indifferently, other people hearing her, as if he were a stranger? how could she look up in his face, seeing what no one else saw there, yet preserve the common composure, the necessary animation? Yes, it was very kind of him not to talk to her: she persuaded herself so for a long time after her heart had grown cold within her, and her cheek pale, as she sat by and listened to him talking to Susan. It must be for kindness, to be still near herself, without betraying their secret; but—as it

happened, night after night, and as she never could perceive that he was seeking an opportunity to gain her own ear, or attract her own attention—colder and colder within her, chilled into a terrible apathy, grew Evelyn's tender heart. When she went home, she ran to her own room, dismissed her maid, would not admit Susan—she had always a bad headache, and could not talk—and then the poor child lay down upon her bed and sobbed without crying. Was it for this she had deceived my lady, and woven around herself a web of separation from all her friends? She thought to herself, she dared not even die while her mother did not know; she had not even that comfort of young trouble,—the satisfaction of thinking of a grave, where pathetic violets might grow and tears be shed. Yet all this had not the external effect upon her which might have been supposed: there was a fascination in it; she must be well, to go out just once again to see him once more, to satisfy herself that, at least, she was not mistaken. So she kept up, kept strong, kept beautiful; and poor Charlie Eldon grew more and more in love with his old playmate, and Susan grew more and more anxious about her friend, and Herbert Wentworth more and more troubled to find out whether there was any way of letting her know that she must break her heart quietly, and be done with it—that he had only made love to her because he could not help himself, but that he was truly sorry that her name was Umphraville.

It happened one day that the little party went to a fashionable breakfast, a very gay daylight party, in somebody's beautiful villa by the Thames. Wentworth was there, but he took no trouble to seek them out; he rather avoided even Miss Latimer and Susan, whom he had been used to devote himself to. Though she did not think it, this was a relief to Evelyn: she strayed into a quiet path away from everybody, scarcely aware how she had separated herself from her companions. She was saying, in her heart to herself, that this would be a sign to her that he had forgetten her; that, if he kept away, she would think it was all over—a dream in a fever—and that she would be free. Every time she said these words over, her heart seemed to grow colder; yet Evelyn smiled, and tried to fancy she was comforting herself. When, just then, just at that moment, she met him coming round a corner, hastening gaily towards the party which he had left. She would have let him pass without saying anything; but he saw her looking pale, he saw her alone, nobody was near to interrupt them, and Herbert

Wentworth was not the man to pass a lady in distress, much less a lady in such flattering distress as Evelyn. He had no objection whatever to keep up his wooing, so long as he could do it unseen; he took her hand quite eagerly and tenderly. "At last, Evelyn! at last!" he cried, as if he had been longing for the time; and immediately her terrors fled like clouds from Evelyn's firmament: it was she who had been in the wrong. "Can you suppose what I have suffered?" he said, "seeing you, yet never seeing you! Ah! Evelyn, *your* gentle spirit can yield to such a necessity; but men, I fear, are less patient. I have been undergoing agonies; but this moment makes up for all."

"I never thought of meeting you here," said Evelyn, faintly.

"No; you thought I was burying myself in noise and folly, as I generally do, to try and forget that I daren't speak to you; but, thank heaven for the impulse, here I am!" said Wentworth; "and now, for the moment we have, let us talk of you. Oh! Evelyn, when, when shall we meet as we used to do? sweet encounters! I shall never forget them. Do you remember Brighton and the bracelet! Ah! I see it on your arm."

"We must never meet as we used to do," cried Evelyn, hastily, as her lover stooped to caress the arm on which she always wore that clasp. "Oh! never, never! I am so unhappy; I cannot tell what to do: I am deceiving them all."

"Deceiving! you, Evelyn? the purest, most transparent creature under heaven!" cried Wentworth. "What is it that lies on your conscience? Come, I am your confessor; tell me."

"Oh! how can you jest about it?" said Evelyn, trembling. "You say you suffer, too; but, think, how dreadful it is for me, to think mamma does not know."

"I *say* I suffer, too!" He put on such a look of unappreciated heroism and wounded tenderness, that Evelyn's heart was touched with the reproach.

"I mean *you* feel it as well," said Evelyn, timidly: "but, then, a man does not require to tell any one—not so much: and, oh! it is quite true; I cannot be happy till you tell mamma!"

"In that case," said Wentworth, gravely, "I have no alternative: though I know beforehand what the result will be, though I feel assured it is destruction to our hopes and ruin to myself; though I can foresee, without difficulty, how

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Lady Umphravillc will receive me, and how I shall fare with my own friends—still, Evelyn, command me. I have no right, surely, to make you unhappy: I would prefer any misfortune to myself. Yes, let it be so: it is destruction; but I will do it at your command."

"Oh, no; do not say that!" cried poor Evelyn, entirely bewildered and overcome. She clung to his arm in terror. He would go; he would do it at once; he would ruin himself,—all for her sake.

"Yes," said Wentworth, pursuing the subject, with melancholy gravity, yet, perhaps, not without a consciousness in his mind that this same proposal of Evelyn's, if she would but keep to it, was about the best mode of delivering himself. "Yes, why should my unhappy existence make so young and bright a creature unhappy? Though I have said how much is at stake, how sure I am of rejection, how strong is the enmity already existing, still, why should I tire your patience, Evelyn? why should I bring tears to your eyes? No, do not call me back, generously: I will go to Lady Umphraville; I will throw myself at her feet; I will be sent from her house, with a mother's stern command, never to address her daughter again: but Evelyn will be no longer unhappy! Let me go!"

"Oh! no, no, no!" cried Evelyn, through her tears.

"You call me back, then?" said Mr. Wentworth, changing his tone; "will you really make up your mind to wait, you dear, impatient, provoking little beauty? Ah! Evelyn, would not I wait for you till the end of time?" Evelyn made no answer; she was drying her eyes, and trying to look as if nothing had happened, for already some of the party were in sight. He made her turn back with him a little way; he whispered into her ear the tender badinage which had overcome Evelyn's anxiety before. The situation reduced him into as lover-like demeanour as that which first won the timid girl upon the beach at Westwood. And Evelyn—poor child! how could she help it?—despite the pang at her conscience and the unsatisfied voice in her heart, grew happy for the moment. It was all a delusion, all a mistake. By-and-bye the sky would grow clearer: if *he* did not hope so, he would not let *her* hope vainly; and then, and then he would tell my lady all!

So she suffered him to lead her back to Miss Latimer's side, which they managed to reach almost unnoticed. Then he whispered in her ear, "I must leave you; I can't talk to Miss

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Umphraville after I have been talking with Evelyn;" and, as she looked up brightly in assent, he went away, and was lost among the gay groups before them. But Evelyn was glad to be left sitting alone, to think over her own happiness. He would go to ease her mind, though he knew it would make an end of all his own hopes; he would sacrifice himself rather than leave her unhappy; he would do what she said, though it should kill him. Poor Evelyn, in the revulsion of her doubts and fears, assailed herself with a flood of reproaches: she who was always doubting him, always thinking of herself; she who would not suffer a little, have patience, a little, for his sake; how did she deserve such devotion? And, as she caught his eye turning towards her from time to time, the sweetest content came to Evelyn's face. Mr. Wentworth was really quite charmed with the effect of his devoirs; he thought it was worth paying a girl a little attention, when she brightened up after that fashion, and resolved benevolently to spare her some of his time when he could. But London, where everything has to be done under the vigilant eyes of society, is not like the country, where people take unpremeditated walks and meet each other, without any lookers on to disturb them; and, on the whole, it was a most puzzling position, enough to have taxed better wits than those of Herbert Wentworth. But Evelyn went home with a lightened step and a lightened heart. She was very young. She managed to forget for one day that things were exactly as they were, and that no one step had been made in any direction: she forgot everything except Herbert, who would have been willing to sacrifice himself for her sake. Susan, who was looking on anxiously, and had learned to read the fluctuations of poor Evelyn's face, saw that something had happened to-day to brighten it, and connected that something inevitably, almost unwillingly, with the interview between Evelyn and Wentworth. She had seen them return together to Miss Latimer's side; she had seen him bend down to whisper in her ear, and then leave her; and she saw, by a hundred involuntary indications, that Evelyn's heart was lighter than it had been for many a day. Susan was not glad; she could not please herself with the thought that Evelyn's happiness in any way depended upon this young man. She had, for her own part, almost a dislike to him, for she had found it impossible, from their first meeting, not to associate him with the agitation of Evelyn. What did it mean? Could they have known each other formerly? Could my lady be

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aware of an acquaintance which was concealed from everybody else? Susan became very much concerned as she thought over it all. This evening was one of their few evenings at home, and Evelyn was in much recovered spirits, pensively happy, and full of dreams, like the Evelyn of Heathcote. Susan determined on one persevering attempt to gain her confidence to-night.

CHAPTER L.

"I THINK you are happy to-night, Evelyn," said Susan, coming to her in her own room, after their old loving girlish fashion, when it was time to go to bed; "tell me why."

"Happy? am I? Oh no; it is nothing particular," said Evelyn, blushing deeply.

"People don't blush for nothing particular," said Susan, "nor grow pale either, nor tremble, nor start, nor turn away their heads. You are glad about something that I don't know of, Evie, just as you were sorry for something that I did not know of, yesterday."

"Don't call me Evie," cried Evelyn, with a little shudder.

"It is my lady's pet name," said Susan stoutly. So it was; that was why, on hearing it, the happiness failed once more in Evelyn's heart.

"Hush! mamma is not here," cried the poor girl. Was she glad? Susan thought so, and became quite indignant.

"Oh! Evelyn, I am afraid for you," cried Susan; "you love somebody else better than all of us, better than my lady, and you dare not say so. Why do you not say so? If he is good and honourable, it will make my lady happy. Oh! Evelyn, you are her own very daughter, Hugh's sister, and you will not tell them; but you cannot hide it from me." Evelyn scarcely breathed for terror: she sat up in her chair with her white lips apart, trembling for what was to come. Did Susan know it all?

"You are happy to-day because you have seen him," said Susan, taking Evelyn's cold hands into her own, and kissing them as she gazed up intently into Evelyn's face; "and you are sad when you see him and cannot speak with him, and he knows it and does not care. Tell me, Evelyn! Oh! Evie, if you cannot tell my lady—I am only a girl, as you are, and I am your sister—tell me."

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Evelyn did not say a word; but a great convulsive sob came from her lips: she threw her arms round Susan with almost a violent clasp, and hid her head on her sister's shoulder. Then the tears came, and she cried; but still she said nothing, not a word in affirmation, not a syllable in denial. Her tongue seemed to refuse its office; and, as she lay upon Susan's shoulder weeping, Susan's heart melted towards her. She could not probe into the poor fluttering heart any further. She entreated, "Oh! Evie, tell me! not because I want to hear, but for yourself; oh! tell me, Evie!" But when Evelyn continued silent, Susan urged her no more. Perhaps if she had, Evelyn's mind might have been relieved; but that would have done no good, except to Evelyn. Events were on their way, which could no longer be hindered, and these solemn wheels of Providence slowly advancing thither, would neither have been quickened nor retarded by a girl's love-tale. Yet Evelyn slept very calmly after all this: she was happy, and one can bear a great deal of agitation when one has one's perverse youthful happiness safe at the bottom of it all; and she was glad that Susan had guessed so much. It relieved her of the immediate and sole pressure of her own secret; and she went to sleep to dream of my lady giving Herbert her blessing and placing their hands together, and pleased herself in the morning when she woke, by drawing happy omens from such a happy dream.

The next day, Hugh appeared somewhat unexpectedly in London. It was now the end of April, and the young man came about his own business, to plead the same cause with Susan which he had despatched John Anthony to lay before his father. And Susan expressed herself extremely surprised by the young man's errand; there was indeed quite a dangerous interview between the two, putting their relations towards each other in no small peril. Susan had not the smallest idea of being called upon to marry whenever Hugh Umphraville chose: she was anything but satisfied with their last meeting, and did her best in reality to make the present one quite as unpleasant. Hugh came of age in May. He had the assurance to propose that their marriage should take place a month after. Susan thought it an unheard-of piece of boldness; and if Hugh had not been very "good," and determined to keep his temper, the chances were that they would have quarrelled, only to repent very bitterly, both of them, after it was over. However, Hugh *was* extremely "good;" he did not give up his wish,

but he postponed urging it for the moment, and declared his intention of remaining for a week or two in town before he went down to Heathcote. Sir Philip was not in town, though he had been re-elected for Hustings: he came up occasionally to have his name reported in the division lists, for the satisfaction of his constituency; but Sir Philip's means were somewhat circumscribed just for the present moment, and he waited with some anxiety for the birthday of Hugh. Hugh's goodness went further than mere forbearance with Susan: he even did his best to make up his feud with Miss Latimer, and established highly amicable relations in the house where his sister and his betrothed resided. He went out with them into society; he was their devoted cavalier in all their rides and drives, and behaved himself, on the whole, with an amiability which no one was prepared for. And young ladies are not supposed to be very highly resentful of the ardour of their lovers. Perhaps Susan was not so very angry that Hugh should wish to be married, though she had no mind to give in to him, on her own part. Still, however, though she gradually melted, the two were not on the most loving terms; for Susan could not quite banish from her mind their first quarrel, nor her fear for a recurrence of the same. And Hugh's sudden appearance filled Evelyn with fright and terror: she was afraid Susan would tell him; she was afraid he might guess for himself, as Susan had done. When he went out with them, she watched in dismay for the appearance of Wentworth. At this time, of all others, when her own confidence in him was momentarily renewed, she could have wished him away at the end of the earth. But circumstances are generally perverse in such cases. During the ensuing week, which looked like a year to Evelyn, wherever they went they met with Herbert. He was in the Park when they drove there: they encountered him invariably in the evening, and sometimes more than once; and Hugh not only remarked him, but asked who he was. "Only an acquaintance—somebody who knew somebody whom Aunt Margaret knew," Susan answered: but Hugh kept his eye upon the stranger. When Mr. Wentworth met them, he addressed himself, after his usual fashion, to Susan; and Susan knew so well that she was not his object, that she, perhaps, permitted his attendance more than she should have done. At least enough to fix in Hugh's mind a latent spark of jealousy, and attract his attention to every word and look of his possible rival. Evelyn sat by, once more growing pale and

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silent, wondering in her heart whether Herbert, who never addressed herself, meant for her what he said to Susan! whether he meant anything at all by his flirtations with other people! why she was left here, shut out from all the world, conscious only of an additional pang when Charlie Eldon came to her side and offered to her, under Wentworth's eye, that service which only a free heart ought to have accepted. And then to turn to Hugh! to turn, feeling how miserable she looked, and see her brother's eye flashing on her secret lover, and faint with fear lest Susan had told him the strange influence which the stranger had upon herself.

Poor Evelyn! Susan had not told him: it was the furthest thing possible from Hugh's thoughts. His mind was busy about his own concerns: he did not see his sister's cheek growing pale, or the sickening faintness that came over her. He watched Wentworth, but he did not watch Evelyn: and if any hostile feelings were in his mind, not one of them was an impulse of defence for his mother's daughter, the poor tender heart which, day by day, was breaking at his side.

CHAPTER LI.

It was the night before Hugh's departure from London. He was going out with Miss Latimer and her young ladies in the evening, and, as he had to start early next day, had been graciously offered by Aunt Margaret a room in her house for the night, that he might take leave of his sister in the morning. Hugh, equally gracious, had accepted the invitation; and, in the meantime, was dining with one of his friends at one of the clubs, of which the said friend was a member. There Hugh lingered until it was time to join Miss Latimer's party. A number of young men, many of them known to him, were talking in the library of the club-house—talking of every topic under the sun, from private and weighty parliamentary operations, which these young gentlemen had, without caring to keep, the secret of, down to the opera and the turf. Hugh took his part freely in the conversation; he was rather excited: this was his last night with Susan, and he meant to make the best use of it; and he talked rather more than his wont, for the reason that his heart beat quicker than usual, and his feelings were considerably roused. When by chance, as we say, the conversation of some few of the youths fell into a

channel painfully familiar to Hugh's thoughts. They began to talk of the prevailing scandal of the day, a trial, not unlike that of "Hertford *versus* Umphraville," which Hugh knew only too well about. They discussed it as young men do, speculating about the damages, and whether the culprits would marry hereafter, and other such edifying questions. Hugh was silenced for a moment, and so was another of the party, who stood by the vacant fireplace extremely pale and haughty, biting his lips, turning his back upon the speakers, and playing nervously with a little gold pencil-case in his hand. At last the young debaters became personal; they commented on the lady, and marvelled over the seduction. The word caught Hugh's ear. It recalled only too vividly many of his own thoughts. "Seduction!" he cried, with bitter scorn, "who believes in it? the word's a fiction: what woman of pure mind was ever seduced?" The bystander at the fireplace turned round with the quickness of lightning, "Do you dare to say so? you——!" he cried, turning a face white with passion towards Hugh Umphraville.

"Dare! that is strange language. Yes, I dare to repeat it," said Hugh. "I say seduction's a fiction. Men have not such power over women: a pure heart—if it were not a shame to speak of it in such a connection—is never seduced."

"And I say it's a lie!" cried the young man, furiously dashing the little toy in his hand into Hugh's face. But Hugh was caught in the arms of his friends behind him, as he turned with equal passion to meet his antagonist. "No, no; you ought to make an apology! you ought not to insult him!" exclaimed the companion with whom Hugh had come here, struggling with him. The whole party threw themselves between the excited young men. "You ought not to have said it," cried Hugh's friend vehemently; "not when he was here. Come! come away! you can't make a row here. Come! and we'll manage it. Come, you fool, they'll be upon us: don't you see they're getting him away?"

Infuriated with the insult, ready enough on a smaller provocation to have encountered his assailant, and blind with passion, Hugh struggled to get free, as did his antagonist. The latter, however, knowing better than Hugh did, left the room at last with his friends, tossing a card contemptuously towards Hugh, who caught it as it fell at his feet. Then his companion assailed him once more. "I suppose I'll have to stand by you," he said; "but why on earth did you say it before *him?* it's

an insult beyond bearing. I should have knocked you down, if it had been me!"

"What's an insult? who *is* he?" asked Hugh, forcing himself into composure; "I believe you mean to drive me mad among you."

"Be quiet! don't you know him? Why, Hugh, you old blunderer!—it's *her* brother—that lady—Mrs. Hertford: you ought to know."

In a moment Hugh became as white, as calm, and as self-possessed, as extreme passion, distinct from personal resentment, could make him. "So it's my father's quarrel!" he said to himself, with a bitterness of disgust and contempt which his companion could not understand; and immediately rejecting the idea of apology or compromise, arranged the preliminaries of the needful meeting as coolly as the most practised and blood-thirsty duellist. These were all to be settled by his "friend," while he hastened to keep his engagement with Miss Latimer;—his last night with Susan—ah! it was Sir Philip who had murdered that last night. But Susan, whose fears were not roused, noticed nothing unusual in Hugh as he made his appearance to accompany them. He was pale and a little excited; but he might well be that, going away as he was, on the next day, and leaving still undecided the matter which had brought him to town. On second thoughts, looking at him again, Susan thought she could perceive that Hugh had been angry; but she took no great notice of that. Her natural acuteness did not warn her, though it was much greater than Evelyn's; but Evelyn watched her brother with the close inspection of terror. She saw that, in the moments when he was not flushed and red, he was white with a passionate paleness: she read inarticulate meanings, which filled her with fear, in the glittering brightness of his eye. Once more they met Wentworth that evening: he came to them with almost an ostentation of friendship; he quite devoted himself to the entertainment of Susan; he turned from Evelyn with the cruelest demonstration of indifference. But the poor girl scarcely remarked this, save by a deeper pang in her heart: she was watching Hugh. He stood a little distance off, not exchanging a word with any one, but fixing his eye upon Herbert, who evidently noticed his observation, and treated it with bravado. What did it mean? When Wentworth left the party, which was earlier than they did, Evelyn, and she alone, saw a glance of defiance pass between the two young men:

her heart was sick with fear. Had Hugh found it out, and was he going to avenge her quarrel? She dared not say a word; she dared not make an appeal to him, in case she might be mistaken: she could do nothing but wait for the issue. Thank Heaven! it was only one night. But Evelyn's terrors were all confirmed when Hugh begged Miss Latimer not to allow any one to wait up for him: he had an engagement, he said, which would detain him late, but would certainly be there to breakfast in the morning. However, Miss Latimer's kindness quite exceeded moderate bounds: she told him not to hesitate to come; some one would let him in, however late it might be; even a lady's house might be disturbed for one night: she would accept no excuses. And Susan was piqued and displeased: the last night, and he had an engagement! he had scarcely addressed a word to her all the evening. Susan thought she had very good reason to be angry. She gave him her hand coldly, and went away to her own apartment before he had left the house,—nothing was favourable to Hugh. While poor Evelyn went down-stairs with him, stealing her arm round his neck, as she had done many a time when she used to try, with her tender unreason, to make him "good."

"Oh! Hugh, something troubles you; it is not about me, is it?" cried Evelyn at last, in desperate temerity, as he was just about leaving her.

"About you, Evie?" cried her bother, laughing; "is there anything about you to trouble any one? Hush! good-night: you shall see me to-morrow."

"You shall see me to-morrow." Evelyn thought it a very strange expression; and, if possible, she was rather more frightened than before, to hear Miss Latimer give her butler (who was man of all work) instructions to sit up for Mr. Umphraville. It seemed to Evelyn like setting a watch and espial upon Hugh. Susan had retired to her room in displeasure; and when Evelyn went to hers, she found she could not subdue the irrestrainable dread which possessed her. She put on her dressing-gown and sent her maid away, and tried to take a book: she thought if John could sit up for Hugh, so could she; and there she sat, trembling and cold, till near daylight, when, in spite of herself, Evelyn fell asleep. When she woke, it was broad day, and she could hear sounds in the house. She dressed herself hurriedly, and went down as pallid as a ghost to see if Hugh had come. The man said "No," with a yawn; and it was only common domestic stirs of the

early morning which had awakened Evelyn. She could not return to her room again; she went into the dining-room, to the window which looked into the square. She watched, without knowing it, the maids outside with their brooms, and the milkman going from door to door. It was not so early now,—nearly seven o'clock. Hugh was to start by an early train: was he not coming at all? She grew quite faint with anxiety, when suddenly the quiet echoes were startled by the sound of a cab dashing at full speed round the square. It came nearer, it stopped at the door, and out of it came Hugh, pale and haggard, his hair thrown wildly about his face, his arm bound up, and in the same dress which he had worn last night. Evelyn ran to the door to meet him. He came in with a stunned, stupefied look, which she could not understand, followed her mechanically into a room, and dropped heavily into a chair by the table. "Oh! Hugh! Hugh! what has happened?" cried Evelyn, bending over him in an agony of terror. Instead of answering her, he covered his face with his hands and bent down upon the table, leaning upon it. "Oh, Hugh! tell me; what is the matter? what has happened?" cried his trembling sister.

Hugh raised his head and looked at her. "I have not killed him, Evelyn," he said, and once more dropped his face upon the table.

Killed him! Evelyn uttered a cry out of her miserable heart. Were all her fears true, then? But she could only stoop over her brother, and beg him to speak to her. His brow and hands burned to her touch; his face, which had been so pale, became red all over, and he cried out involuntarily with pain when she touched his arm.

"Hugh, are you ill? are you—wounded?" cried Evelyn: she thought she understood it all now.

"Only my arm," said Hugh; "never mind me. I did not kill him, Evelyn; that's all I've got to say. Tell Susan I didn't kill him; and now I'm going home." He got up as he spoke, as if to leave her; but Hugh was giddy and faint; he wheeled round as if on a pivot, staggered, and would have fallen, had he not saved himself by seizing another chair. Evelyn did not know what to do: she had to forget and drive away from her every image, save that of her brother mysteriously ill and wounded, perhaps in danger, and depending upon her care. She begged him, if he could, to come up-stairs and lie down; she wound her delicate arms round his strong

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one to help him up, to help him to walk. She was thankful that no one was in the way to see them as they went tottering up-stairs; for Hugh obeyed her in a mechanical way, like a man stupefied; and with her heart and her head throbbing, as though both heart and temples would burst, she led him up-stairs to the room which had been prepared for him. A sharp cry of pain, as he struck his wounded arm against the wall, was all that Hugh uttered; but he threw himself upon the bed with something like an expression of relief. Evelyn stood gazing at him in silent agony; she did not know what to do or what to say, and there was no one here to whom she could go for counsel. "Could you sleep, Hugh?" she asked. He shook his head impatiently, and groaned with pain from his arm. Then the poor child went to get some Eau de Cologne to bathe his hot forehead. He was in a high fever, the pulses in his temples throbbing fiercely under her fingers. Should she send for a doctor? Never all her life before had Evelyn been called upon to act for herself, and she did not know what to do. At last she left him and ran softly down-stairs to beg John to bring a surgeon: the man stared at her in amazement. "I daresay it's only a bruise; let me look at the young gentleman," he said. But Evelyn cried, "No, no! bring a doctor," so eagerly, that he could not refuse. She was terrified at any one seeing him; terrified lest any one should hear those ghastly words falling from his lips. When she returned to the room, she found him lying more quietly, with his face turned from the light and his hand over his eyes. Seeing that, she drew the curtains and let down the blinds to darken the room. Something white was on the floor; it was a handkerchief spotted with blood, and out of the handkerchief fell a card. She took it up also without thinking. The name rang into Evelyn's heart, as if with a voice of thunder,—"Mr. Herbert Wentworth." She let it fall again with a faint moan, and pressed her hands to her forehead. Oh, Lord of pity! Oh! Heaven! where angels and compassions are! It was all true. She thought to herself, sitting beside her helpless brother, that she knew it before, that she was not surprised, yet not less terrible was the confirmation. But Hugh stirred and moaned in his fever; his brow burned, his breath came fast, his face was red with feverish heat and pain. She got the cooling perfumed water again, and bathed his forehead and his hands with it; she bent over him, thinking every moment an hour, full of terror for his condition, longing for the skilled eye which

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could tell what was wrong with him. At last, not half an hour after, though it seemed so long and weary a time to Evelyn, John appeared at the door with the surgeon whom he had gone to seek. This gentleman made Evelyn withdraw while he examined his patient. John remained to assist him—John, who would repeat again any incoherent words which Hugh might say; but Evelyn had to leave him in their hands, taking up once more the card which threw such a terrible light upon the story. This time she went to seek Miss Latimer, feeling vaguely a necessity to be directed by some one. Miss Latimer was in her dressing-room, but already dressed: she was an early riser, and had already begun to write letters, her favourite occupation.

"Hugh has come in," said Evelyn, with her pitiful looks; "the doctor is with him. He has come in ill, wounded: oh! tell me what I should do."

"Wounded!" cried Miss Latimer.

"I am afraid," said Evelyn, growing paler and fainter with every word she said, and feeling somehow as if to tell it made it more sure and more fatal, "I am afraid he has been fighting with some one; I think so, from what he said."

"Come here, sit down; you will faint, child," said Miss Latimer. "Fighting with whom? had he any quarrel? What is that in your hand?" She looked at it, for Evelyn was not strong enough to prevent her.

"Wentworth!" she exclaimed, "Wentworth! Oh! you poor children, victims of other people's sin: that explains it all."

"What explains it?" said Evelyn hoarsely; her lips were so parched, she could scarcely speak.

"Poor girl! you don't know; how should you?" said Miss Latimer. "This Mr. Wentworth whom you have met in society has some reason to hate your name, Evelyn: you must have noticed how he has avoided speaking to you."

"What then?" said Evelyn almost sharply. Miss Latimer looked at her pallid face, her dry lips, her form rigidly still—the only alternative from trembling—and her eyes, which had scarcely slept all night, and which were unnaturally bright and dilated. She was sorry for the gentle, timid young creature, suddenly thrust into the midst of trouble; but she did not know what a thunderbolt she held in her unconscious hand, ready to launch upon Evelyn's unhappy head.

"Your father's sin brought shame to one of his family," said Miss Latimer; "he is the brother of a lady whom your

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father—in short, Evelyn, he is Mrs. Hertford's brother: I daresay you have heard the name." Evelyn did not faint; she could not grow paler; but it seemed to herself as if the blood was failing from her heart, the light from her eyes. She made no answer; she turned no look of surprise towards her executioner: she did not even move for a time, but kept sitting on Miss Latimer's sofa, seeing everything, feeling nothing, save an utter hopeless, speechless agony, which somehow took sensation from her. Then a sound struck upon her ear: it was a moan from Hugh in his chamber of pain, where the surgeon was doing his will upon his wounded arm. "Hugh!" said Evelyn blankly to herself, but aloud; "I must go to my brother!" and she got up, feeling that she must stagger and fall when she rose.

Miss Latimer supported her, held her up on her own arm. "My poor child! you are not accustomed to distress; you are too sensitive," said Aunt Margaret. "I must send a message at once for your mother." Evelyn started and stood erect. Her mother! her mother whom she had deceived.

"It will grieve mamma; could we not wait till Hugh is better?" she said. Miss Latimer sat down at her desk without taking any notice of Evelyn; she took a clean sheet of paper,—she, who knew exactly how many words came within the tariff of the telegraph. She wrote immediately in her clear handwriting, "Margaret Latimer, London, to Lady Umphraville, Westwood, Westhampton. Hugh is ill: the anxiety is too much for Evelyn by herself. Come immediately. No danger;"—and ringing her bell, found that John was just now dismissed from Mr. Umphraville's room, and could be sent off immediately to the telegraph office. Evelyn could return now to her brother: she did so, Miss Latimer accompanying her, and begging her to restrain her feeling. The doctor told them that Hugh's arm was broken, that he trusted it was only the fever of his wound and a previous high state of mental excitement which ailed him otherwise, yet would not be surprised if it turned to brain fever, unless the more urgent symptoms were speedily relieved. When he left, engaging to return in a few hours, Evelyn took her place by her brother's bedside. The room was darkened; Hugh had fallen into a heavy sleep; everything was still. But for that dull sense of pain, Evelyn could have supposed that she too was stupefied: she went about groping for her old thoughts, putting together the broken pieces of that dream which had

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been shattered with such dismal destruction. Herbert Wentworth! *he* had known this all along; in the midst of all her ignorance *he* had been fully aware that they never, never, never could stand together plighting their faith before the world; he knew that he never could go to my lady, never ask Evelyn's hand of her father or her mother. Oh, the lie! the terrible, crushing, dismal lie! And Evelyn, too, had made a sham in it: she herself, my lady's own child, had deceived her mother. And suddenly one impulse came out of Evelyn's misery,—to fall at my lady's feet, to tell her the whole, every word, and then oh, thought of comfort!—to die! But that was all in the future, both the dying and the confession: and, in the mean time, she sat in the silence alone, listening to Hugh's hard breathing, wondering where *he* was, or who was watching *him;* all alone among the ruins of her hopes and happiness, without saying a word to any one of the terrible share she had in it all, heavier than any other's. Hugh did not know what an echo of death rang in poor Evelyn's fainting heart when he said, "I have not killed him." Miss Latimer did not know with what ruthless annihilation she had swept away all the remaining stay and comfort of the poor child who came to her for counsel. My lady did not know that, though Hugh's wound was not dangerous, Evelyn's was to the heart. Nobody knew, nobody was by: she was all alone by herself in her misery; and the bystanders spoke of her sensitive feelings, and how deeply she felt her brother's misfortune,—even blamed her for want of self-command. Poor Evelyn! that was to be all the issue of all her love and all her sufferings.

CHAPTER LII.

My lady had not been without her troubles in this time of solitude. Harry had once more run away from Heathcote to come to his mother. This time his stay was only for two or three days; but my lady felt a certainty in her mind that it had greatly exasperated Sir Philip. She was much occupied with thoughts of this, and grievously concerned for her boy, who had exclaimed in her presence, in an unguarded moment, that his father brought people to Heathcote who were not fit to be there, though Harry was obstinately silent when she questioned him afterwards, and would give no explanation.

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Harry had been persuaded to go back just two days before that morning which had brought so many events and so much trouble to Hugh and Evelyn in London. My lady was up nearly as early as her daughter on that day; she had no reason for it, but was disturbed and wakeful, troubled about many things; and the strange solitude of the house, with only Edie in it, left this mother of many children so unusual an amount of quietness and leisure, that it naturally brought thoughts of unusual gravity to her mind. Then, immediately after breakfast, an applicant from the village came with a lamentable account of a poor family there, who were all stricken down with sickness, and whom their neighbours feared to attend to, in terror for a fever which had been wandering about the country, striking its victims here and there in the villages round. My lady went to see the unfortunate invalids; if it was not fever, it was suspiciously like it; but, encouraged by her example, a nurse was found in Westhampton to attend to them. My lady returned home, not entirely satisfied with her morning expedition; she was perfectly free fear for herself, but had all the dread of infection which a mother is usually troubled with. She determined to give Edie a holiday, and send her with her governess to visit Lady Curtis; and, after she had changed her dress and fumigated herself, she looked in at the school-room door to signify her intention. "There, that will do; don't come near me, Edie: I'll throw you a kiss," said my lady, laughing. "Tell grandmamma I have been seeing somebody who is ill, and wanted to get rid of you for a day. I have ordered the carriage for you, Miss Banks. Now, Edie, make haste and get ready." Edie did not require to be stimulated: it was a bright day, and the prospect was pleasant; even Miss Banks appreciated it. They drove away in high spirits, quite disposed to enjoy their holiday, while my lady sat down by herself in the empty house, full of thought. Whether it was an involuntary remembrance of the infection which terrified the country people, or certain premonitions in her own person, or merely the unusual solitude of to-day, my lady once more began to dwell upon and realize what would be the position of her children, in case "anything should happen" to herself. As she pondered, she drew her little writing-book towards her: she was without immediate occupation, and her mind was full; she felt for the moment, in her thoughtful leisure, that she could not do better than use this opportunity to put upon paper some new indication of her

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wishes. Half smiling at herself, wholly serious, she began a letter to Hugh, begging him to take the welfare of his sisters most especially under his own care, telling him how happy she was to think of Susan, who was already so dear to them all, and to whom she could so well entrust even her sensitive and tender Evelyn; and begging Hugh, who would soon have an independent position, and could treat with his father as she never could do, to interfere on behalf of Harry. When she had completed this and sealed it, my lady placed it safely in a drawer of her own desk, and took out a letter to read: it was from Rothes. This boy was not a lad of sentiment; but somehow his mother's heart took anchor upon him when she was troubled. She read his letter with a pride and confidence in her son, which even Hugh's communications did not inspire her with. This letter told my lady how Rothes had written to his father, asking in his own bold, brief, reasonable way, that Harry should be sent to Rugby; it was the only hope she had at present for her neglected youngest boy, for she knew that Rothes would not prejudice his cause by making injudicious appeals or reproaches. She knew how soberly he would point out the advantage of Harry coming while he was still there, and having the benefit of his own acquaintance with the regulations of the school and the character of "our fellows" there. It was a gleam of comfort in Harry's cloudy future. She put away the letter with a smile: there were very few expressions of fondness in it; but there was her son whom, boy as he was, she could trust anywhere, and in any circumstances; and no one can tell what a support and comfort that was to my lady's heart.

Then she went up-stairs to her dressing-room,—what to do? Another quite kindred occupation, inspired by the same involuntary, perhaps unreasonable, sentiment. It was all idleness, leisure, a sort of half play, which could only be done when nothing more important was in hand. She began to arrange what jewels she had in separate cases: all that could be called family jewels had been left at Heathcote; but her own private store was still considerable. "I shall never wear them," she said with a smile: she rarely did wear them indeed; it was not her custom, and she put them aside,—this for Evelyn, and this for Edie, and this for Susan. She took quite a pleasure in it; and it was with a little impatience that she heard Martha's voice at the door, informing her that a gentleman waited to see her below. It was still early; not

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more than eleven o'clock. A visitor at this time surprised her: she did not recognise the name sent up to her,—a gentleman on business. Nevertheless, my lady put away the jewel cases, and went down-stairs. He was in a little room opposite the morning parlour, which, by dint of being very plainly furnished, having no view from its windows, and being generally disused, had, by tacit consent, been devoted to business. He was a spare acute-looking man, with "attorney" written in his respectable face: his name was Proctor. He got up and bowed when my lady entered the room, and looked full at her with a critical eye,—an eye not directed to her matron grace, but full of a scrutiny of another kind, seeing it was her mind and her temper, and not her beauty, with which this practitioner had to do.

"I come on behalf of Sir Philip Umphraville," said Mr. Proctor, "and it is my duty to inform your ladyship that, unless I have the happiness of inducing you to enter into more amicable private arrangements, I shall be compelled to serve a summons upon you for Sir Philip's suit before the Ecclesiastical Court." My lady started and grew momentarily pale; she had looked for it, yet it was a shock. "What suit?" she said; "I have not heard of any until this moment."

"No; my client has been unwilling, exceedingly unwilling, to annoy your ladyship," said the man of business; "but I am instructed that recent events have convinced him of the necessity of what he is about to do,—only about to do, I beg your ladyship to observe; in case of your consent to his private proposal, proceedings can be stayed at once."

"I asked, what suit? Will you be good enough to tell me?" said my lady, firmly.

"Certainly, madam, certainly: a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights," said the attorney. And then for the moment my lady felt the real bursting of that fountain of bitterness which has lost the cause, and impassioned the appeal of so many injured wives. The yoke pressed upon her: the injustice, the cruel possibility of an abominable despotism, roused all the anger and defiance in her heart. She had to recal herself to herself sharply, with pain and difficulty: the keen looker-on saw her cheek redden, her eyes sparkle; but he saw nothing more.

"And what is the private proposal?" asked my lady, constraining herself.

Mr. Proctor began to fear he had a more difficult anta-

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gonist to deal with than he had expected: he knew that a woman who kept her temper under such circumstances, was not a common person. "Sir Philip's proposal," he said respectfully, "is, that your ladyship should return to Heathcote. In the meantime he asks nothing more, only that you should once more assume your place at the head of your family, and live under the same roof and on terms of amity with himself."

"That is not possible; it is not in the nature of things," cried my lady quickly. "And if I do not consent?" she added slowly, after an interval.

"Then, madam, I shall be compelled, painful as it must be to all parties," said Mr. Proctor, "to summon your ladyship before the Ecclesiastical Court." There was a pause. Most likely the lawyer expected an outburst of that woman's passion, eloquent and impotent, wielding words which cut like daggers, yet can but scratch the sturdy buckler of the law, to which, in his profession, he was well enough used. He expected to see the powerless woman dash her head against the wall, in the blind and terrible resentment of one who could not help herself, yet would not submit. He was mistaken. It was in my lady's heart, all that flood of fiery words, all that force of bitter, unavailing, self-destroying resistance, for she was only a woman, an insulted wife, and not an angel of meekness and forbearance; and my lady felt at that moment how all the other women had felt, whom perhaps, in her better wisdom, and at times of less temptation, she had condemned for their unwise and useless passion. But once more she constrained herself.

"Do you know," she said, "or has Sir Philip informed you, that this is entirely contrary to his agreement with me?"

"I was not aware there was such a document in existence," said the wary lawyer.

"There is no document: I knew that in your law a document was useless," cried my lady with involuntary bitterness; "there was my husband's *honour*, as I perceive you are aware."

"I am sorry to say, madam, that a gentleman's honour is not a recognized legal security," said Mr. Proctor; "but I understand there are circumstances, various acts touching the young gentlemen—your younger son's repeated residence with you, for instance—which nullify the tacit agreement which your ladyship alludes to."

"Poor Harry!" said my lady. "Sir Philip knows very well that it was not by my will or desire that he came to West-

wood. I beg your pardon—What is it, Martha? a messenger! from whom?"

"An express from Brighton!—the man has to be paid!—a message by the telegraph!" cried Martha in great excitement, holding out with awe the mysterious letter. My lady took it, growing faint with terror; she knew nothing important enough in the circumstances of any of her friends, to warrant this urgent manner of communication. She tore the envelope open, without thinking of her visitor: it was Miss Latimer's message about Hugh. Everything had prepared her this morning for some coming event: she was quite unused to this startling method of correspondence, and her nerves were excited and unsteady. It seemed to her like Hugh's death-signal ringing in her ears: she was overwhelmed with a new agony which she had never looked for, never feared. She started up, calling Martha to her sharply, in her haste and terror; then her eye fell upon Mr. Proctor, who sat waiting quietly for her answer: it was almost too much for my lady.

"I am quite unable at this moment to make any reply," she said hurriedly; "I have just had some startling unexpected news, and must go to London immediately. Pardon me; I *must*, I have no alternative. When I am in town, I will take competent advice, and inform Sir Philip of my decision. In the meantime, he must proceed as he thinks best; I can do nothing more."

The lawyer bowed and went away, unable to resist the imperative influence of her agitation. Then my lady sent off Martha to prepare a few things for her journey, and herself sat down to write a hurried note for Edie, and one to Miss Banks, explaining her absence. When these were completed, she went up-stairs herself to hurry her preparation, and sent her man to the inn at Westhampton to order the convenient vehicle called a fly, which answered all the purposes of all the gentility of the little town. My lady was not like herself; she was quite nervous, tremulous, and excited. She said in her own mind that Miss Latimer would not have sent for her, but in serious circumstances; and when Martha, without any particular instructions, made her appearance, dressed to accompany her mistress, my lady felt with a pang how far she had drifted from her usual self-command and power of action. They drove away as rapidly as hack horses could go towards Brighton, and had not to wait long for a train. Before evening she would be by her boy's bedside; but what might happen before then?

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CHAPTER LIII.

When Susan left her room on that morning, she was surprised by the air of excitement which prevailed around her. If she had at all noticed the unusual stir in the house, she had not connected it with any particular event or person; but when she went down-stairs, and found, on inquiring, that Evelyn was with her brother and Miss Latimer in Mr. Umphraville's room, she began to grow alarmed and uneasy. *She* could not go to Mr. Umphraville's room, to ask what was the matter; but Susan kept going and coming upon the stairs, in the hope of meeting Aunt Margaret, and hearing what was wrong. She could hear sometimes from that room, which she had no warrant to approach, a low moan of pain: she became very much alarmed, in spite of herself; and when the door opened, and Evelyn, with a face from which every tint of colour had departed, suddenly appeared, going upon some needful errand, Susan, wrought to the highest pitch of anxiety, could almost have believed anything. "Evelyn!" she cried in a whisper, but with such an imperative question in her voice, that Evelyn understood her instinctively, as one person in an overstrained state of feeling naturally comprehends another.

"No," said Evelyn; "he is ill, but not so very ill. I was thinking of other things as well."

It was the first, the only hint of her own special misery which had dropped from Evelyn's lips, and she made it simply as an explanation of her looks, which, the poor girl knew, were worse than the other occasion called for. But Susan was too much absorbed in that other occasion, to think of Evelyn; she detained her, inquiring anxiously: and Evelyn told her the bare facts as she had told Miss Latimer, with a dry, narrow, choking simplicity, which might have shown how terrible they were to her. But Hugh had fought,—Hugh had been wounded. Susan was like all the others;—when her own heart was assailed, she could not pause in the first instance to think of other people. She thought only of Hugh. What could she do? she had no right to go to him as his sister had.

"Let me help you till my lady comes, Evelyn," cried Susan, surprised into tears and trembling, by this sudden shock. "Perhaps he will not know me. Oh! why did you not call me sooner, when Hugh is in trouble? Oh! Evie, Evie, don't you know what he is to me?"

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"Yes," said Evelyn, in the quietness of her exhaustion, which was too great for sympathy. "I am going to fetch something for him; he has had a sleep; when I come back you can go in with me. Mamma is coming—yes—she will tell us what we all ought to do." And Evelyn went away with her gliding gentle step, which was heavier and slower than it had ever been before. Susan stood at the door of Hugh's room waiting for her, and Susan could not fail to see the blank misery of Evelyn's face. It only moved her more deeply with her present terror. Hugh must be worse than she said. Hugh's sick bed, for the moment, filled all the world to Susan: she could see nothing else till she saw with her own eyes what was there. When my lady arrived late in the afternoon, she found the two girls together waiting upon their patient. Hugh began to show signs of a more satisfactory state, the doctor said, but those signs were only visible to his experienced eye. Evelyn and Susan thought him very ill as they relieved each other in attendance upon him, bathing his hot forehead, and administering his medicine. Indeed, before my lady came, Susan had taken all the active part of the nursing into her own hands. Hugh had resisted faintly at first, kissing her hand with feeble humility, and ashamed in the midst of his sufferings to receive such services from her, yet her presence visibly soothed him; and Susan, who had recovered her wits and self-possession, as soon as there was something to do, took by degrees the entire charge of the sick room. Evelyn would not leave him,—would not lie down: she sat on a chair by the bedside, sometimes stirring to do something that was wanted, for the most part quite quiet, and trusting him to Susan, but never uttering a complaint, nor saying a word. It was sadder to look at her in her pallid beauty, than it was to look at the sufferer on his bed. When my lady came, and had heard the whole tale, one of the first things she did was to ask Evelyn for the card which Miss Latimer had seen in her hand. Evelyn gave it up mechanically, and my lady sent off at once to the address upon it to inquire after Hugh's antagonist. She thought that was the first thing he would want to know when he himself was better; but my lady could not have imagined that the poor tortured girl by her side waited with an anxiety ten times more desperate than that of Hugh, for the answer to this message. It came at last, and was to the effect that Mr. Wentworth was doing well—which, concise and unsatisfactory as it was, calmed the momentary

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fever into which Evelyn's great anxiety had thrown her; for it did not occur to her that Mr. Wentworth would almost rather have been shot outright than confess that he was severely wounded, and that Hugh Umphraville was the better man. My lady carried this news with her to her son's bedside: she thought it wisest to break in at once upon the mystery with which the whole transaction was surrounded.

"Hugh," she said, in her frank natural voice, without reproof, yet without any undue sympathy; "I have sent to inquire after Mr. Wentworth, and I am sure it will be a satisfaction to you to know that he is going on well. Don't say anything; by-and-by it will be time enough to explain. Now, my dear boy, for our sakes, you must try to compose yourself and sleep." Hugh turned round towards her with his bright feverish eyes: he made no reply to what she said. He laid his hot hand upon hers, which was not very much cooler. "Mother, you are ill!" cried the young man. Susan was on the other side of the bed, she was thinking more of Hugh than of my lady, and Susan's heart rose in hope when she heard him forget himself to notice his mother's looks. She thought it the best sign in the world for Hugh; she did not even look up to see whether he was right in what he said.

"Hush! Hugh. I am quite well; go to sleep," said his mother, smiling on him. "And Evie, my love, you are quite worn out: you have had more to do than you have been able for: you look like a ghost, my poor child. Go and lie down; you can leave Hugh to me now."

If Evelyn could have spoken the cry in her heart, she would have said, "Oh, mamma! come and hear me—hear me first! I have more to bear than Hugh has;" but the poor child had no courage. She could have said it to her mother alone, but not before Hugh and Susan, and Miss Latimer, who had entered the room just now. She rose up disheartened and despairing; she could not look up to receive her mother's kiss; and as she went away with her faint unsteady steps, Susan came and put her arm round her.

"Don't be anxious about Evelyn, my lady," said Susan, seeing how Lady Umphraville's eyes followed her other child. "She has been sitting up all night watching; I will take care of her." So the two girls went away together to Evelyn's room. They did not say a word to each other on the way; but when they reached that chamber where Evelyn had watched all last night, and wept many a night before, she fell down at

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Susan's feet utterly worn out, and able for nothing more. Susan raised her up tenderly.

"I can guess something, Evie," she said. "Don't trouble to speak, only tell me if I am wrong. Hugh has met *him;* but Hugh did not know he was anything to you; and somehow, Evie, dear—oh! somebody must have deluded you! you have engaged yourself in secret. My lady does not know; there is something more? I cannot guess any further, Evelyn."

Evelyn looked up piteously in Susan's face.

"He was to tell mamma: he promised it over and over," she cried in a sudden burst to relieve herself. "And he knew all the time that he never could go to my lady—never, never, never! it was impossible!—and I—I heard it to-day."

And that was all. The one young creature put the other to rest, tenderly, silently, like a mother, and sat by her bedside, holding Evelyn's hands, weeping tears and prayers over her, moved to the very heart by the contrast of her own lot and that of her friend, finding more to move her in this, than if she could have wept personal tears over a like misfortune. And after a time, when everything was dark and silent, Evelyn at last fell asleep. My lady was with Hugh, my lady who did not know yet how her other child was stricken; and Susan did not leave Evelyn all night. The next morning Hugh was better: the fever had subsided, and his wound was doing well. He was able to forget himself. He warned them all that his mother was ill; but everybody smiled at him. And every one got up next day, to bear their own burdens,—Evelyn to go about heavily, longing, pining for a moment to open her heart to her mother, but finding none; my lady thinking of her many cares, of how she was to answer Sir Philip, and wondering with a pang of fear to find how confused her thoughts were, and how hard to keep together; while Susan watched them all with anxiety, fearing she could not tell what. Several days passed after this fashion. Hugh became better. My lady's messengers brought back constantly the same answer, that Mr. Wentworth was doing well; and every one in the house began to be alarmed about my lady, who was evidently not doing well. First Evelyn, then Susan, and then Miss Latimer took up Hugh's fears: she eat nothing, could not rest, forgot what they said to her; twice in one day she became giddy, and had almost fallen, while crossing Hugh's room. It was impossible for Evelyn to tell her

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story while her mother was thus: she could only watch my lady with anxious eyes, and assail her with inquiries,—was she ill? was she sick? would she not take anything? Poor Evelyn's questions were not always opportune or judicious; but ere the week was out, the doctor himself interfered, unasked. He told my lady that he could not permit her to remain any longer out of her own room, out of bed; she was ill; she was becoming very ill. Even while he spoke, she fell back in her chair faint and giddy. From thence they carried her to bed; and in a day or two Lady Umphraville was pronounced to be ill of a malignant fever, the same fever which had scared the villagers at Westhampton. It had been in her blood, gaining upon her, since the morning she left home. After she yielded, it went on with rapid strides: she became frightfully ill, delirious, unconscious of everything. Hugh got better, and went about with his arm in a sling. Petulant Edie wrote eager letters to Miss Latimer, begging to be allowed to come to London. Lady Umphraville was summoned before the Ecclesiastical Courts, to answer her husband's plea against her; but my lady lay unconscious of all, tossing in her fever, her elder children by her side,—Hugh blaming himself bitterly, as if it were his fault; Evelyn watching her mother in despair, hoping against hope, feeling as if the terrible separation of that secret must remain between them for ever. My lady did not know either Hugh or Evelyn; her thoughts wandered away into former years; her strength ebbed day by day: the violence of her malady conquered her not easily, but painfully, for her constitution was strong; and day by day, the grave looks of the physician at her bedside told how little hope there was in science and experience. The house grew hushed, panic-stricken, full of the terrible awe and excitement of a death struggle: my lady came nearer and nearer, every hour, to the gates of death.

CHAPTER LIV.

At length, the crisis of the fever came. Evelyn and Susan alone were with my lady, from whom no representation of danger could keep either of these girls; but Martha, in the next room, and Miss Latimer and Hugh, down-stairs, sat up all night, too anxious to rest. The patient fell asleep: that hour of heavy import passed; everything seemed to have taken a

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favourable aspect for the moment. She slept long, almost all the night, while the watchers beside her dared not look at each other, lest they should weep aloud for joy. They sat in silence on either side of the bed, scarcely daring to breathe, comforting themselves with recollections of all they had heard of such recoveries; how the sufferers awoke, after such a sleep, calm, weak, in their right mind, and safe,—safe, delivered out of the hand of the destroyer. The doctor had been in the house, waiting long to see her, before my lady awoke; and when she did wake, it was as they had hoped. She looked round upon them all with a happy recognition, which moved them to tears of joy; and, for the moment, Evelyn and Susan were almost careless of the doctor: they supposed they could see, without his help, that the danger was over, that my lady was safe; but *he* said nothing to encourage their triumphant hopes. He still kept his grave looks as he turned away from the bed-side. Susan followed him out of the room when he went to write a prescription. "Do you think she is not safe—not yet?" asked Susan, in sudden dismay, all her fears returning upon her.

"Safe!" said the physician; and he turned away from the terrified girl with those killing words, which every one who knows affliction knows the meaning of,—"while there is life there is hope."

Susan went back with a face like death to her post, while Evelyn, full of tears and smiles, moved about noiselessly, looping up the curtains a little, putting a vase of flowers where my lady could see them, making an involuntary offering of gratitude in her innocent instinct of brightening the room now the danger was past, and saying broken words of prayer and thankfulness in her heart. Her mother was saved! She forgot every grief, every pang, in that one overwhelming joy. While, only in the next room, only with a single partition between, the physician's terrible, calm, sympathetic voice, was describing to Hugh how his mother must die. Oh, heaven! and must it be? The mother, the stay of all their young resolutions, the comfort of all their troubles; the mother, whom every child she had could have died for, could be glad to die with; she, whom years had not touched, in the strength and beauty of her middle age, *must* she die? Could they do nothing for her, all those doctors, all those means of science, all those cares of love? Nothing her own God, whom she served, and to whom the prayers of her children had risen

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without ceasing, night and day. Oh! that hard, hard, heart-breaking experience, which, one time or other, all must gain! that there are times when God does not hear prayer; that He, the Giver of all good, whom to seek is to find, sometimes will not grant what we ask in an agony with all our hearts, will not hear us, though we vex the very heaven with the cries of our anguish. It seemed impossible, not to be believed, almost an impious dread, a suggestion of atheism, to the overwrought hearts of Evelyn and Hugh. Poor Evelyn, who did not know it! My lady lay very still, perfectly conscious, watching, with a smile upon her face, the movements of her child: she saw what Evelyn was doing, and why, as well as if she had seen her heart,—the better arrangement of the little table, the flowers, the fanciful looping up of the curtain, to shade, without darkening, her mother's face, all so many outflowings of thanks and gratitude. My lady lay quite still, recollecting herself: the moments were long in that first hour of consciousness; but, gradually, moment by moment, brought to my lady the secret assurance, in her heart, that she was about to die. A slight sound on the other side attracted her after a time. She turned her head as much as she was able, and saw Susan, with her face full of suppressed anguish, labouring to keep down the tears which would come to her eyes. My lady looked steadily in her face, and put out her hand. "Ah! Susan; *you* know!" said my lady. She felt, in her failing strength, a momentary comfort at the thought; and then it occurred to her that they must all know, that she must see them all, if possible. She stirred in her bed with an anxious impulse, struck with a sudden fear in her mother's heart, lest it might be too late; and Evelyn heard and came to her side.

"Is there still time?" said my lady: "bring Hugh to me,—Hugh!"

Susan hastened away, without a word, to call him. "There is time for everything, now, mamma," said Evelyn; "you are better: everything is right now; and presently you will be well, and able to come home. I can scarcely believe it for joy." Hugh, who had been at the door, came in as she spoke: his face was like Susan's, as pale as death, and full of that terrible knowledge which it is impossible to hide. Evelyn looked at them both with a gasp of terror. What was it? It was not fear, but a frightful *certainty* of something, which filled these two young faces with a meaning which she trembled to guess at. But my lady knew what it was: she made

her son come near, put her feeble arm round his neck, and kissed him.

"*My* Hugh! I am glad you know," said my lady, faintly. Evelyn put Susan away, and pressed forward, almost between the mother and son: she turned her woeful face from one to the other, with a look of agony. "What does he know?" cried Evelyn; "what does he know?" No one could answer her; and then she cried aloud in the extremity of her despair and anguish, and fell down at their feet like one dead. Her mother was going to die! henceforward, and for ever that secret must stand between them in earth and heaven. The poor child fell like a clod at her brother's feet, senseless, helpless, as if the thought had killed her. He lifted her up in his arms, carried her to the next room, and left her with Martha. No one could think of Evelyn in this terrible conjuncture, not even my lady, who, in her death-calm, feared lest it might be too late to send for her other children.

"Go to your father, Hugh: beg him to come to me; let us forgive each other before I die," said my lady, "and bring Harry and Edie, and send for Rothes. Ask if there is still time; and if there is, let me see all my children. Stay a moment, Hugh. Once more: if I never should see you again —Susan!"

They stood by her together for a moment: she kissed them both with her faint lips; and before Susan could restrain her sobs, Hugh was gone. The young man took no time even to dash away the burning tears from his own eyes. He rushed out of the house and through the Square, seeing no one, thrusting the passengers aside, yet totally unconscious that he did so, till he was far enough off, as he thought—a dozen times too far off, had he known—to disturb my lady's sick-room with the sound of the vehicle he hired. Then, for the next two hours, a headlong race, too rapid to have time to think. At Brighton he got a horse, and galloped furiously towards Heathcote, sending on a messenger to Westwood, to bid Edie to meet him at a little railway station near, at which, by chance, a train happened to stop. When he had urged the horse, which could go no further at such a pace, up the ascent to Heathcote, he rushed in, without preface, upon Sir Philip, who sat dawdling over a late breakfast. Hugh took no time to see how his father regarded him: he threw himself into a chair, because he was not able to stand. "My lady is dying!" he said, with a gasp, and fell into a

passion of restrained sobbing, the grief that could wait long, but would have its due, however sorely he strove to keep it down.

"What?" cried Sir Philip, starting from his chair, and throwing down his paper. The old butler, who was in the room, started too, and let fall what he was carrying. My lady! they had only seen her in her vigour and strength: it seemed impossible that she could die.

"My mother is dying," said Hugh, calming himself: "the doctors say there is no hope. She has sent me to bring Harry, and to beg you to come, father, that she may forgive you before she dies."

It was not precisely my lady's message; but Hugh could not tolerate the thought that my lady had to be forgiven, as well as to forgive.

"She sent you to fetch Harry, to bid me come, that she might forgive me! If you think I'm to be taken in so, you're mistaken," said Sir Philip, who, notwithstanding his bravado, spoke with white lips. "You can tell my lady I shan't go; you can tell her it won't be much in her favour at the trial, if I report such a message. Neither shall Harry go. Harkye, Ormond! see that young rascal shut up in his room as soon as he comes in. It's all a fiction: my lady's got a headache, and means to make up with me because of the trial; but I'll have my rights: I shan't go!"

"My mother is dying," said Hugh; but he had no spirit to spare to be angry. "Let Harry go with me, Sir; he shall return again, when—when——Let my mother see him before she dies."

"Confound you!" cried Sir Philip, violently; "she's not going to die! Don't talk your abominable nonsense to me."

Hugh, who was half fainting with weakness and fatigue, got up and turned round to old Ormond. "Where is Harry?" he said: "let me see him; he has some rights, though he is only a boy. I can't wait, Ormond! where is Harry?"

Harry was out—no one knew where; and Hugh was in a fever of impatience to return. He hastened out without saying another word to his father, and, mounting his own horse, which had been brought out for him in the interval, dashed across the country to the railway station, where Edie already waited for him. The little girl could scarcely speak, though her heart was full of questions. Hugh looked so pale, so desperate, so full of devouring anxiety. He could scarcely tolerate

the delays of the journey; he sprang out of the carriage when it came to a station, only to spring back again, to do something. He could scarcely be still, even when they were rushing on at full speed; for continually before Hugh's eyes was the pale face in that bed. What might have happened while he had been away? When they arrived, sick and fainting with anxiety, they found they were in time; there was no change. Another physician had been called, and had seen my lady; but, like the first, gave no hope. The fever was gone, but had left in its place a terrible deputy, more hopeless than itself, and only for a day or two longer, at the utmost, could they hope to detain my lady. Rothes arrived that same evening, summoned twice by the telegraph,—once by Hugh, who did not forget that duty, even in his haste, and once by Miss Latimer, who supposed Hugh must have forgot it. My lady was perfectly calm and placid among her children, only longing for Harry, who seemed most in her mind, as the only one absent, and to whom she was always framing tender messages. She was too far into the shadows of that valley to be moved to any angry feeling by her husband's refusal to come. "He will be sorry by-and-bye," she said, "and then, children, be tender to your father; and, *my* Harry, my poor boy! tell him his mother thought of him to the last, though he was not here to see her die." That night, once more, they all sat up in their dismal watch, fearing lest my lady might go from amongst them every hour. Evelyn, utterly broken and in despair, kept by one side of the bed, half hidden by the curtains, scarcely able to lift her eyes; and Susan, on the other, watched my lady's wants, and ministered to them softly. Martha was within call. Poor little Edie had been put to bed; and Hugh and Rothes together, but, saying nothing to each other, sat in the silence, starting at the faintest sound below. In the middle of the night Evelyn came down to tell them that my lady, who had been very wakeful hitherto, had at last fallen asleep. As she came down the stairs, Evelyn heard a sound outside at the hall door: it was a low knocking, gradually growing more urgent; then came a voice, entreating in a whisper, which Evelyn could not hear. Not without a thrill of superstitious alarm, she called her brothers. When Hugh opened the door, letting in a flood of the soft May moonlight, a tall gaunt figure rose from the threshold, and stalked in among them. "Is my lady dead?" asked a voice so unnaturally hollow and calm, that they scarcely recognized it. It

was Harry, who, penniless and desperate, had walked all day and all night, all the way here from Heathcote, and had made up his mind that he was too late, though he would not make a noise, lest he might disturb the last hours of his mother. Sir Philip, who was in the most wretched state of mind, had tried to justify himself to himself by refusing loudly to believe in my lady's illness. When Harry went to him to demand his permission, he refused it vehemently. It was all a trick; *he* knew it was; and he forbade any of the servants to give the boy money for his journey, on pain of dismissal, upon which threat Harry, confident in his savage strength and length of limb, set out, in dogged defiance, under his father's eye. This was the story the boy told to his brothers and sisters; and then he sat down on the stairs to wait my lady's awaking: yet once more he should see his mother. And now all my lady's children watched and waited for the coming of that inevitable hour.

CHAPTER LV.

She was awake, but she took no notice of any one by her. Susan had left the room; Evelyn was alone, watching her mother. My lady's eyes wandered; she looked as if she were looking at something on the other side of the room, and a smile of indescribable delight and surprise,—yet something far too faint and sweet and feeble to be expressed by those violent human words—was on her dying lips. She said something which Evelyn could not comprehend. "Did you speak, mamma?" said the watcher, trembling with fear at her unusual looks.

"Hush! hush!" whispered my lady, who was not speaking to Evelyn. "Hush! Evie will hear you, poor child! Hush! my blessed ones! I see you all: thank God!" Trembling with awe and terror, Evelyn followed her mother's eyes, her mother's smile. There was no one there; but the early dawn of the sweet May morning was stealing in through the darkness, and the ineffectual light which had been burning all night began to waver faintly in the air of the morning. Who was my lady speaking to? She spoke again as Evelyn listened, looking into the vacant space with that wonderful smile. "All —every one—little Mary—little Willie—my baby—my darlings! Ah! I am coming—soon—directly—you need not go away." And now all Evelyn's efforts could not keep down a

sob of extreme emotion, an almost moan of pain and awe and breathless fear. It sounded through the extreme silence of the room and the house. My lady started slightly, and turned her eyes to her as if she had but that moment awoke. "Is it you, Evelyn," she said, faintly. "Who has been here?—I have had such a happy dream."

"What, mamma?" asked Evelyn, under her breath.

"I thought I saw all my children who are in heaven. I can scarcely suppose it was a dream. Evie, dear child, I shall soon be with them," said my lady.

Evelyn threw herself down on her knees by the side of the bed. "Oh, mamma! *must* you go?" she cried, with a burst of weeping which it was no longer possible to restrain.

"Hush, my child—go and call them all—all my living ones," said my lady: "all but Harry, my poor boy—has Harry come? has your father come? bring them all to me. Evelyn—I think—there is not much time now to lose." They came in silently, every one, and stood round the bed. Hugh, Rothes, poor Harry, pale with his journey, little Edie, startled out of her sleep, Evelyn and Susan, with the patient paleness of long watching, and something of the composure which those who have their business and duty in a sick room acquire. *They* knew what to give my lady—how to attend to her. The others gathered round the bed, helpless, full of awe and the bitterness of first grief—a desolate, silent grief; the youths, stern in their extreme self-command, the little girl stifling her passionate sobs as she best could. My lady drew Harry to her first—then she looked round upon them all, keeping him by her side. "This is Hugh's birthday," said his mother. They all started—it was so strange, so terrible to hear her speaking of common matters; to think of all the old family rejoicings which the words suggested—even of the special ruder festival which should have celebrated this day, and to know how dismally, how sadly, it should be commemorated. Hugh hid his face in his hands, and groaned aloud—the words brought to his mind his father's sin, which had led him into that quarrel—his own sin, which had brought his mother here, out of her healthful house, to die. Between them they had killed my lady. He groaned in irrepressible anguish. His birthday—and now to make it memorable for ever, she was to die!

That was not my lady's thought. "It is his birthday," she said, more faintly: "go to my poor boy, Susan—let him have some comfort on this day. And you will take care of Evelyn

and Edie, you two, and watch over them. I think somehow, Evelyn has done wrong—either I dreamt so or some one told me. I am not angry, my dearest child. I don't think I know what it is—but my Evie will never, never do so again."

Evelyn had thrown herself once more beside the bed, in a speechless, tearless, inexpressible agony. Her pretty, downcast head was within reach of her mother's hand, which my lady laid upon it tenderly, with a touch that was like a blessing. Then she went on—"I have not much to say to Rothes. Rothes, dear boy, I trust you—you have been my comfort. I read your letter before I left home," said my lady, with almost a wonder in her face that it was so long a time ago. "Rothes will tell your father: as soon as everything is over and I am safe, my dear boys must go down to Heathcote: and, Hugh, go with Rothes, but let *him* tell your father—he has most patience; and Harry, my child, you must not be disobedient any more."

"I don't mind, my lady—nothing's any good now; and he's done it all, and I can't call him father!" cried Harry, with that passionate resistance to the inevitable calamity which was glad at least to blame some one, since nothing else could be done.

"God has done it, and we call him Father," said my lady; "but I know you will remember what I say. Grow to be a man for my sake, and for the girls', who will want their brothers to protect them,—poor little Edie, whom I hear crying, and who thinks I am never coming to her. I am coming to you, my dearest child; my own, my youngest little one. You are to take care of my baby, all of you; my dear little motherless Edie, who will want me most of all."

And poor Edie was not to be restrained. She pressed forward to her mother's arms—her mother's bosom. She cried aloud, in a passion of lamentation, which they all were too ready to join—too weak to control. At last the poor little weeping child was taken away, and set down quietly by herself in another part of the room. And then my lady motioned to Hugh and Rothes to raise her up in their arms. That wonderful smile came upon her face again, and she said her last words to them so strangely, with such an ineffable sublime unreason, her face moving, her eyes shining, as if she made an intimation, to be received with joy, of something secret only known to herself, that they drew round her with awe and wonder, unable to conceive what it was. "I suppose I was

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dreaming," said my lady, "but they were all here to-day, children—all, every one of them—even the nameless one who did not live a day: all your little brothers and sisters whom I used to mourn for—I was so foolish—I did not know what provision the Lord was making for me. I do not know if they are gone back again," said my lady, looking round, "or if they are waiting; but they are all there, as safe as you are yourselves, my dear, dear children. I saw them all as they had come from my Lord. And now come all and kiss me, and lay me down, now that I have told you. I thought you would be glad to know." But they turned away, all of them, not daring to look at each other. Was it the wandering of the weary mind, just ready to be gone? God knows. And then they came one by one to kiss the pale lips which still bore that smile: and she put her thin hands out and said a solemn blessing—"God and our Lord, who had saved the mother and her children, save them, and bless them, every one!" and then was silent, and lay calm, the shadows gathering over her, to rest.

To rest! it was not yet the final peace which knows no disturbance. In the early May morning, her son's birthday, the very hour one-and-twenty years ago, when she first was a mother, she lay still, in such another calm, and took her rest. Then it was the first pangs of Nature—now it was life itself, severe and dangerous, which God had accomplished safely for her, and brought her through. Her mind wandered—thank Heaven for such wanderings!—back to that time, and forward to those who were waiting for her in heaven. All that she had to do now, after this halcyon hour of quiet, was only to die. And my lady was still strong in the native springs of life. It was hard, that last piece of labour—once she had almost feared it—now her spirit released, she was no longer careful of anything; and her Lord did that for her as He had done all things else. Before the summer night fell on Hugh's birthday, the last work was over, and my lady, never more to say mortal words to those whom she left upon the earth, was with her little children at her Saviour's feet in heaven.

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CHAPTER LVI.

AFTER my lady was "safe," as her own pathetic words said, her sons, hard though it was, in faithful obedience to their mother's commands, left her in her bed, still undisturbed by any preparations, in the first solemn beauty of death, and went down to Heathcote. They went together, those three, saying nothing to each other for all that melancholy journey; and when they came in sight of that house which had called her mistress for so many years, that house where they had all been born, it seemed impossible to Hugh and Rothes and Harry to suppose that she had been already disconnected with it for so long, and that they themselves had almost cursed its gloom in their hearts, and called it home no longer. It was home now: at sight of it they all broke down. My lady's presence took possession for ever of the house which she had forsaken. They almost thought to meet her at the door, from whence she once went forth in sorrow, never to come back again. It was no longer their father's house, bereaved of everything that made home a delight. Tender memories gathered close about that garden where she had walked, those rooms which she had occupied: they forgot Westwood and its stranger life. My lady came back to Heathcote for evermore when her sons returned that day. Their very appearance seemed to fill the house with consternation and dismay: the servants came flocking up into the hall, watching them as they passed; every one seemed to guess instinctively what were the news they brought. And when they appeared before their father, and told him their errand, Sir Philip, after a storm of anxious, pretended disbelief, fell into a wretched remorse and contrition, pitiful to behold. He abased himself before his children, in his bewildered and conscience-stricken grief; he made a feeble attempt to justify himself,—how was he to know that Hugh was right? my lady should have sent some surer message. He inquired about her wishes anxiously, crying in an abandonment of weak grief, which no one could have believed him capable of: he was so eager to do anything "to please her," to make himself forget that his wife had sent for him on her death-bed, and he had refused to go. My lady! she was his antagonist and opponent no longer. Once more her memory returned upon him, the person upon earth whom he had not only loved best, but re-

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spected most. He looked round with a groan, as if now only his house had been bereaved. For Sir Philip, as for his sons—though to them only with tenderness unspeakable, and to him with a mixture of retributive justice—my lady returned to Heathcote that day. But he had not sufficient courage to go with them to conduct their mother to the family resting-place, where she was to sleep with her children. The boys by themselves, with the speechless, stern companionship of John Anthony, who departed for his moors without a word when all was over, and, in the presence of many sorrowing and respectful spectators, conveyed my lady to the lodging where so much as remained of her was to wait "till the Lord come." Now that she was gone, all the country stirred with a silent *éloge* of recollections. My lady had been stricken like a tree, full of fruit and shadow. The whole district missed her presence, as though half its strength and energy were gone; and even Lady Curtis, with unusual tears in her bright old eyes, cried with a sob, "Eleanor! there is not one like her left among you, old or young!"

After this, Sir Philip, to whom that house where my lady's memory had come to take possession was no longer tolerable, went to live in London. He remained there in future almost the whole year through, never passing more than a night at Heathcote. In the first stings of his self-condemnation, he yielded implicitly to all my lady's wishes, showing himself even eager to carry them out. By-and-bye, however, Sir Philip made a second marriage, and recovered his spirits. His new wife lived extravagantly, and entertained no friendship for the step-children, who had no disposition to receive her very amiably. The baronet grew almost out of acquaintance with his sons and daughters: he became dissipated, and did not live a very long life. Lady Curtis saw him out also, the long-lived vivacious old woman. And not many years after these events, the doors of Heathcote opened in congratulation to receive Sir Hugh. And, in spite of his duel and his foolishness, Susan never faltered further: they were married so soon, that the bride took off her bridal garments only to resume her robes of mourning for the dead. These two young creatures—Hugh with all his sins of temper and rashness, Susan only nineteen years old, and under the ban of Aunt Margaret's evil auguries—had to make a home and shelter for Evelyn and Edie, my lady's children, who were younger and more helpless than they. They did so, and God blessed them. They lived

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at Westwood, which my lady had made sacred, until Sir Philip's death; and there my lady's sons and daughters, long desolate and yearning for the household guide who was no more among them, at length were persuaded to return into the happiness of their youth, and made their home.

It was a very long time before Evelyn got over her heavy share of the family trials: the worst was past when my lady gave her child her tender forgiveness for the sin she did not know; the worst was over when Evelyn hid her face by the bed where my lady lay dead, and prayed God in an agony of supplication—which, poor child! might be unreasoning, but was sincere—to let her mother, even in heaven, see her child's heart, and know her secret now. After this, the wall of that separation remained no longer between Evelyn and her mother's memory; but the tender heart was long of healing. Charlie Eldon's honest love tale could not even gain a hearing; and it took years to soften in Evelyn's gentle soul the terrible prints of that morning's misery when Hugh came home with his broken arm. But, whatever people say, no doubt they will all be hidden, overgrown with new flowers and gladness, presently: only for this consummation, Charlie, as well as other people, must be content to wait. But there has already been in the papers a record of Mr. Wentworth's marriage, and of a diplomatic appointment abroad, which that gentleman adorns. He married the daughter of a great person with influence; he did a great deal better for himself than he could have done, under the most favourable circumstances, had Evelyn been one of the Evelyns of Surrey, or had there been no obstacle between him and the daughter of the Sussex baronet. So Mr. Wentworth found no great occasion to lament his innocent flirtation, and seldom thought of it, save when the cold weather brought certain twinges into a vulnerable point which had once been wounded, but which was not his heart.

And as for Rothes and Harry, it is impossible to say how they have turned out: Rothes is only at Oxford, promising to be a first-class man—not to say that he *is* first oar besides in the most famous crew of the Isis; but whether he will fulfil my lady's hopes of him, whether he will be Lord Chancellor, remains for the next twenty years, and not for this historian, to decide.

And now Susan is my lady; but though they give her the name abroad, no one says so to the young wife at home. That name which, borne by universal consent, became a title of

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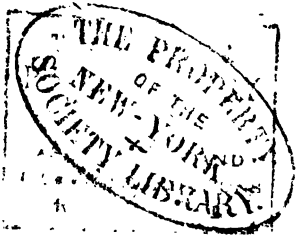
fondness and household endearment, almost as tender as mother—that name which expressed above all others her womanliness, her dignity, her noble and liberal domestic rule, —that name cannot be given in Heathcote, even to Susan. It belongs for ever to that Dame Eleanor Umphraville, who waits among her children for her Lord's coming, and who, in the hearts of her old servants, her old friends, and her sons and daughters who remain, is still my lady, bearing the tenderest title of natural authority evermore.



THE END.

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